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Reversing the Readiness Assumption: A Proposal for Fiscal and Military Effectiveness

Jason W. Warren and John A. Bonin

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ABSTRACT: Looming budget cuts will necessitate adept management to retain a military capable of competing and winning by avoiding the mistakes made in prior drawdowns. This article presents a framework for government and defense leaders to prepare for the coming drawdown and plan for the necessary capacity of tomorrow across the diplomatic, information, military, and economic framework.

As Peter Mansoor posits “Anyone can design a military force in times of plenty; it is in times of scarcity that strategic leaders with foresight are most needed.”¹ The US economy is hurtling toward such an era with the Department of Defense (DoD) fiscal year 2022 budget of \$715 billion failing to keep pace with inflation, and for the first time since 9/11, defense spending is facing significant realignment.² While the Service Chiefs have quietly begun planning for drawdown, there is a lack of overall historical awareness for such decision making, as well as a clinging to a readiness paradigm better replaced by an effectiveness framework.³ This coming austerity will necessitate adept management to retain a military force with enough personnel and capabilities to compete and win.

The result of a US Army War College project, *Drawdown: The American Way of Postwar*, demonstrates the United States’ past failures to manage force reductions, leading to inefficient expenditures and losses in “First Battles.”⁴ Heeding the insights from *Drawdown*—technological development, strategic and doctrinal updating, and more education for leadership—the military can counter a loss of force structure during drawdowns and allow leaders to plan for necessary capacity across the diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) framework.⁵

The authors wish to thank Lawrence Tritle, emeritus professor of history, Loyola Marymount University Los Angeles, and J. Casey Doss, lieutenant colonel, US Army retired, for their thoughtful reviews of this article.

1. Peter Mansoor, “Foreword,” in *Drawdown: The American Way of Postwar*, ed. Jason W. Warren (New York: New York University Press, 2016), xii.

2. Joseph R. Biden Jr., *President’s Fiscal Year 2022 Defense Budget* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, May 28, 2021); David Barno and Nora Bensahel, “The Headwinds Looming for the US Army,” *War on the Rocks*, October 27, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/10/the-headwinds-looming-for-the-u-s-army/>; and F. G. Hoffman, “National Security in the Post-Pandemic Era,” *Orbis* 65 no. 1 (2021): 17–45.

3. Charles Q. Brown Jr. and David H. Berger, “Redefine Readiness or Lose,” *War on the Rocks*, March 15, 2021, https://warontherocks.com/2021/03/redefine-readiness-or-lose/?fbclid=IwAR0YiGXMBSXHBdyh2T2HeT8DNsE_YHksxnUIXn_6Ce_0FZhCv2bjDAMnt6I.

4. Charles E. Heller and William A. Stofft, eds., *America’s First Battles, 1776–1965* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), x–xi. The First Battles’ thesis was a positive critique of the tactical revolution of the 1980s, but it fueled the readiness paradigm.

5. Michael E. Lynch, “Introduction: The American Way of Postwar: The Liberty Dilemma,” in *Drawdown: The American Way of Postwar*, ed. Jason W. Warren (New York: New York University), 19. For DIME, see Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, Joint Publication (JP) 1, Incorporating Change 1 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2017), I-12–I-14, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf.

Although the military controls only the military lever of national power, it operates across the DIME framework as a part of the interagency, and government leaders should take the following measures to ameliorate the coming drawdown: (1) a ground forces reversion to a mixed standing force and cadre construct that retains experience, while reducing some personnel costs; (2) increasing investments in operations in the information environment (OIE); (3) a permanent integration of allies into the standing military establishment; (4) meeting threats with a periphery strategy; (5) and reprovisioning the US Air Force (USAF) and US Navy (USN) for the reality of precision fires.⁶

Moving from Readiness to Effectiveness

For the first time in American history, National Security Council Report 68 (NSC 68) created a large standing military establishment at the onset of the Cold War.⁷ Since this era, national security experts have preferred the readiness of standing forces for possible near-term battles over an effective strategic force. There has been little analysis about readiness as an appropriate organizing principle for this construct, which is fiscally problematic because readiness requires a significant investment in a large standing military establishment focused on training for current missions.⁸ Toward the end of the Cold War, historian Paul Kennedy warned policymakers to balance such perceived contemporary military needs with the economic health of the nation state (the “E” in DIME).⁹

Measuring the effectiveness of military forces is a more realistic framework and a cheaper organizing principle than readiness, with forces like cyber already engaged with adversaries. Effectiveness entails how well military forces are accomplishing missions across the levels of war and satisfying the requirements of national policy objectives.¹⁰ The readiness of standing forces usually does not equate to effectiveness in achieving national policy objectives. America’s pre-1950 era witnessed better strategic military results than the postmodern era even though

6. See Lieutenant General (US Army, retired) Michael K. Nagata, “Focus on the Enablers for Long Range Precision Fires,” *Breaking Defense*, July 28, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/07/focus-on-the-enablers-for-long-range-precision-fires/>; and Andrew Feickert, *U.S. Army Long-Range Precision Fires: Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report R46721 (Washington, DC: CRS, March 16, 2021).

7. Executive Secretary, *A Report to the National Security Council, NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security* (Washington, DC: US National Archives, April 14, 1950), <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116191>; and John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 164–65.

8. “New Army Chief of Staff Wants to Put People First,” National Guard Association of the United States, August 13, 2019, <https://www.ngaus.org/about-ngaus/newsroom/new-army-chief-staff-wants-put-people-first>. There is even a “readiness” subcommittee in Congress for the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA): “Readiness Subcommittee Mark Summary for H. R. 6395 National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021,” press release, House Armed Services Committee, June 22, 2020, <https://armedservices.house.gov/2020/6/readiness-subcommittee-mark-summary-for-h-r-6395-national-defense-authorization-act-for-fiscal-year-2021>.

9. Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), xxiii.

10. JCS, *Joint Operations*, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Incorporating Change 1 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2018).

the standing military forces were *not* ready at the outset of wars, experiencing tactical losses in First Battles.¹¹

The post-1950 expensive standing military establishment has fostered a tactical mindset, distracting military leadership from strategic thinking. This has led to less national policy success at astronomically higher costs.¹² US/NATO readiness did achieve deterrence against the Soviet Bloc, but even during the Korean and Vietnam Wars the Soviets remained deterred when US readiness in Europe ebbed. As the Cold War intensified during the Reagan administration, scholars explored military effectiveness, particularly the mismatch between policy objectives and military ways and means.¹³ This scholarship complements *Drawdown's* conclusions on the necessity of technology and allies to offset the loss of force structure means during drawdowns. Winning and losing wars is a complex issue beyond the defense establishment purview alone, but the lack of strategic results is a negative return on investment for an expensive force structure.¹⁴

Achieving strategic results is imperative in an era of renewed great power competition which the Department of Defense has described as the “competition continuum,” where powers remain in various states of cooperation, competition, and conflict.¹⁵ Readying for a conflict in progress is a contradictory proposition. The forces in competition rapidly adapt to current circumstances which may require training for new equipment, organizations, and procedures that the readiness structure did not anticipate. As the Joint Staff already utilizes metrics for effectiveness in assessments of campaigning and operations, the Department of Defense could readily refocus on effectiveness at the operational level of war that links to both strategy and policy.¹⁶

Additionally, an effectiveness model corresponds with the competition continuum, measuring a unit's progress toward objectives with the reality of continual campaigning. It acknowledges conflict occurring in multiple military domains and reorienting military leadership to current missions. Readiness is largely irrelevant when adversaries have *already* seized the initiative in the

11. Since 1950, the United States fought to a tie in Korea, lost Vietnam and Afghanistan, and achieved middling results in Bosnia and Iraq.

12. After extremely high expenditures from 1943 to 1945, the budget recovered to pre-war levels until doubling after NSC 68 to over \$400 billion. It continued to climb steadily (except the Eisenhower administration) by about \$1 billion a decade until hitting the mid-\$700 billion of this era (all are numbers in 2013-adjusted dollars). William R. Johnston, “US Expenditures for Defense and Education, 1940–2014,” Johnston's Archive, last modified May 5, 2018, <http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/policy/edgraph.html>.

13. Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray, eds., *Military Effectiveness: Volume 1, The First World War*, new ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10–11, 15–18.

14. Jason W. Warren, “The Centurion Mindset and the Army's Strategic Leader Paradigm,” *Parameters* 45, no. 3 (Autumn 2015): 28.

15. JCS, *Joint Concept for Integrated Campaigning* (Washington, DC: JCS, 2018), 8.

16. JCS, *Joint Planning*, JP 5-0 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2020), K-6, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0.pdf?ver=us_fQ_pGS_u65ateysmAng%3d%3d;JP_3-0\(2018\)](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp5_0.pdf?ver=us_fQ_pGS_u65ateysmAng%3d%3d;JP_3-0(2018)), xi.

information environment.¹⁷ Even within an effectiveness structure, readiness processes must exist while tactical forces are reconstituted. Effectiveness would take the lead in this model, while readiness would orient toward the type of training units need based on the current effectiveness of friendly forces.

Understanding Mixed Force Structure

The route to high command once ran through the military's educational institutions. Douglas MacArthur was superintendent of West Point and Malin Craig was commandant of the US Army War College before becoming Army Chief of Staff. A critical difference between the contemporary and pre-1940 environment was that few meaningful command opportunities existed in the interwar years.¹⁸ National Security Council Report 68 increased opportunities for tactical command, and the expansion of the civilian workforce within the newly created Department of Defense steadily pushed strategic thought away from the officer corps. A tactical-only mindset emerged with the increased number of troops now available and tactical level command became the nearly exclusive path to attain general officer.¹⁹

The previous officer paradigm rested on the development of strategic leaders. The pre-1940 American officer corps appreciated this and spent much time on professional military education, discussions of strategy, and broadening assignments focused on managing the post-1898 US imperial holdings. These officers produced strategic plans at the war colleges that resulted in victory in 1945.²⁰ With approaching austerity, it is sensible to return to the earlier paradigm.

A realistic decrease in standing forces also recognizes relevant social conditions. Since colonial times, Americans have been suspicious of the standing military, described in *Drawdown* as the "Liberty Dilemma" or paradox where the standing forces required to maintain American liberty represented a threat to that liberty.²¹ This view has not disappeared. For example, recent calls to avoid naming recently retired General Lloyd J. Austin III as secretary of defense demonstrate the lingering fears of military threats to civilian authority.²² A return to a smaller establishment of a mixed standing and cadre force could ameliorate these latent American attitudes.

17. Craig Timberg and Ellen Nakashima, "The US Government Spent Billions on a System for Detecting Hacks. The Russians Outsmarted It," *Washington Post*, December 15, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/russian-hackers-outsmarted-us-defenses/2020/12/15/3deed840-3f11-11eb-9453-fc36ba051781_story.html.

18. Michael R. Matheny, "When the Smoke Clears: The Interwar Years as an Unlikely Success Story," in *Drawdown: The American Way of Postwar*, ed. Jason W. Warren (New York: New York University, 2016).

19. Warren, "Centurion Mindset," 30, 32.

20. Michael R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy: American Operational Art to 1945* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011).

21. Lynch, "Introduction," 53–54.

22. Eliot A. Cohen, "This is No Job for a General," *Atlantic*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/12/no-job-general/617326/>.

A smaller standing military would also force the federal government to observe the realities of current recruiting conditions. Due to ambivalent attitudes toward national service, large numbers of eligible recruits in college, an increasing felony rate, and the obesity epidemic, recruiting shortfalls have been legion.²³ With troubled recruits often filling the shortfall, an intertwined military sexual assault crisis emerged, leading recently to the unprecedented relief of 14 of Fort Hood's commanders, and the crisis has shown no signs of abating even with additional leadership attention and budget outlays.²⁴ The result of a responsible drawdown would likely mean the retention of higher-quality recruits and reduced military crime.²⁵

All force reduction measures must be executed with caution and an eye toward remobilization. A reduced force structure would only hold before reinforcements arrived; hence a threat analysis is critical in harnessing resources at the decisive point. As with any strategy, the possibility of failure does exist, particularly if partners in the Pacific and Europe do not materialize or instead, join American adversaries. What standing force posture is necessary to gain superiority in the Indo-Pacific region through effectiveness of existing structure, offsetting some active-duty personnel shortfalls with technology and other capabilities while maintaining some presence in Europe? This question should ultimately drive the current drawdown and the consideration of a better strategic and technological capacity and more robust alliances, but with less standing forces.

Knowing Partners on the Periphery

The Chinese case calls for the United States to employ a peripheral strategy with a new coalition of neighbors bordering China. The United States cannot shoulder the manpower burden required to stare down a Chinese army of over two million personnel and a half-million more reserves, while the China also maintains a strategic population advantage.²⁶ Offsetting this manpower disadvantage requires the United States to both bolster alliances in the Pacific and fill staff shortages with allied officers. Since World War I, the United States has fought with combined Joint headquarters.

23. Beth Bailey, *America's Army: Making the All-Volunteer Force* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 128, for initial recruiting problems of the AVF. Also see Dennis Laich, "Manning the Military, America's Problem," *Military Times*, July 22, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/opinion/commentary/2019/07/23/manning-the-military-americas-problem/>. While the military mostly satisfies its recruiting goals, it often lowers standards by issuing "waivers."

24. Kyle Rempfer, "Fourteen Leaders Relieved," *Army Times*, December 8, 2020, <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2020/12/08/fourteen-leaders-relieved-or-suspended-after-scathing-report-on-fort-hood-crimes/>.

25. This would not solve the problem of reconstituting during conflict.

26. Office of the Secretary of Defense, *2020 Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2020), <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>, 38. For reserves, see Global Security, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/pla-reserve.htm>.

With the US military waiting until a crisis to fill all staff billets, lag time is created between integrating allied officers and a proper functioning command and control enterprise. Given the United Kingdom's and the Commonwealth's reduction of forces, while American headquarters are too few and undermanned, there is an opportunity for allied officers without meaningful billets to staff these critical US shortages.²⁷ The French should also join this arrangement.²⁸

A peripheral strategy of continuous concentric pressure to contain China in its near-abroad calls for strategic raids in the information environment, especially against the Chinese command and control and party leadership structure. A US coalition would simultaneously support anti-government rebels, cut off Chinese garrisons in ocean areas, fix Chinese forces on the Korean Peninsula, and employ a "grid" support structure on China's southern flank.²⁹ Some of this strategy already exists in unclassified portions of US Pacific planning, the difference here is counting on less-available force structure at the outset of conflict and more on allies, while also reorienting most of the Marine Corps to this region.

The Pacific is the main focus of the Marine Corps, and with the service's proposed drawdown in forces, the US Marine Corps Reserve (USMCR) should be expanded.³⁰ The means for this strategy against China require stationing the majority of the Marines in the I Marine Expeditionary Forces and the III Marine Expeditionary Forces in the Pacific, with the II Marine Expeditionary Force reduced to one Marine expeditionary brigade rotating as a Marine expeditionary unit in the Atlantic as an emergency reserve. A remade, smaller-capital ship Navy and a reconfigured littoral Pacific fleet would provide the technical amphibious landing capabilities, temporary resupply, and some fire support, with Naval reservists manning additional amphibious ships to support the USMCR.

With this strategy, US Army Pacific fully embraces not only the effectiveness paradigm but also precision fires. It also provides both theater information and fires commands with multi-domain task forces, and long-range fires battalions, operating in conjunction with the Navy and Marines. Army Support to Other Services (ASOS) would include providing longer-range fires and conducting OIE

27. For shortages, see John A. Bonin, "On Headquarters: Use and Abuse of Army Operational Headquarters from 2001–2015," in *Landpower in the Long War: Projecting Force after 9/11*, ed. Jason W. Warren (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019).

28. For recent French operations, see Michael Shurkin, "France's War in the Sahel and the Evolution of Counter Insurgency Doctrine," *Texas National Security Review* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2020/2021), <https://tnsr.org/2020/11/frances-war-in-the-sahel-and-the-evolution-of-counter-insurgency-doctrine/>.

29. John A. Bonin and Mark H. Gerner, *Continuous Concentric Pressure*, Land Warfare Papers 43 (Arlington, VA: Institute of Land Warfare, 2003). See also John Schaus et al., "Four Paths to the Grid," Indo-Pacific Theater Design Working Paper 3 (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2021), <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Four-Paths-to-the-Grid.pdf>.

30. Philip Athey, "Corps Looks to Cut More Than 2,000 Active-Duty Marines in 2021 Budget," *Marine Corps Times*, February 10, 2020, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2020/02/10/corps-looks-to-cut-more-than-2000-active-duty-marines-in-2021/>.

from bases in new Army area commands in the Western Pacific.³¹ As a war with China would precipitate one with North Korea, the Eighth Army must remain at current capacity, with the 2nd Infantry Division containing a rotational armored brigade combat team (ABCT), a long-range missile brigade, and a theater air defense artillery brigade forward in the Peninsula, as the core of a combined Joint Force. Additional brigades, or even a multidivision corps, would remain available for reinforcement from the continental United States. With the US-led coalition fixing Chinese forces in anticipation of limited offensive operations, US armored and mechanized forces would form the *schwerpunkt* upon which the rest of the coalition would rally. The Army's security force assistance brigades (SFABs) would advise these allies, which are now critical to operations given the smaller number of US forces.

The same strategic problem with China exists when conceiving an effective military capacity for a resurgent Russia. Russia still poses a regional military problem to critical American allies in and out of NATO, but to a lesser extent than China because of a stagnant economy and static population. Russia, however, has successfully modernized its once ineffective force and leads the West in the crucial areas of missile technology, armor, and warfighting doctrine.

More dangerously, the Russians have embraced information warfare.³² Russia employs an initial disinformation campaign against local populations, seconded by cyber and electronic warfare attacks, followed by the insertion of special operating forces; then, only if necessary, does it introduce conventional forces. This is a far cry from its predictable echelon deployment of conventional forces in the 1980–90s. Russia also conducts strategic raids in the information environment on the United States, meddling in two presidential elections and backing proxies who hacked into the US Treasury and Commerce Departments through a SolarWinds contractor. Even with a reduced force from the Cold War now numbering around 950,000 soldiers (with an active reserve of one million), Russia remains a dangerous enough threat to require some US forces designated for Europe.³³

A direct military approach against Russia is also a losing proposition and calls for achieving exhaustion through continuous concentric pressure on its

31. John A. Bonin, "Area Commands" (unpublished concept, US Army War College Center for Strategic Leadership, July 2021).

32. Andrew Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military: Russia's Ground Combat Capabilities and Implications for U.S.-Russia Competition* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), 47, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3099.html.

33. Radin, "Russia's Ground Combat Capabilities," 42; and Gil Barndollar, "The Best or Worst of Both Worlds? Russia's Mixed Military Manpower System," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), September 23, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/blogs/post-soviet-post/best-or-worst-both-worlds>.

periphery.³⁴ As in China's case, maintaining a large standing force bent on tactical dominance in Russia's near-abroad is a poor investment. Just enough US forces repositioned in Europe are required to prop up NATO and other allies. This posture would also decrease the need for scarce strategic lift assets that have atrophied for decades. With this strategy, European allies would still bear the brunt of an unwise conflict with a declining power.³⁵ A more-capable Soviet Union did not take advantage of a similar NATO economy-of-force posture in Europe during the Cold War with the United States decisively engaged in the Pacific.

An enhanced US Army Europe-Africa headquarters capable of providing NATO an operational command post for the command and control of multicorps combat would also take the lead in Europe and include a forward stationed armored cavalry regiment backed up by a robust continental corps of up to six divisions. Just as important in any of these potential conflicts is using enhanced Army theater air defense artillery, long-range missiles, and OIE to counter the Russian missile and area-and-access denial advantage.

Given the Army and Air Force's multi-domain operations (MDO) concept for combating China and Russia, these friendly heavy forces require their own missile strike capabilities to fight a modern battle.³⁶ The recent combat between heavy forces in the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict evidenced the lack of protection and survivability of these formations from precision fires enhanced by drone/robotics technology.³⁷ MDO doctrine is an attempt to offset current Russian advantages and future Chinese capabilities. The Russian scenario has focused on a so-called wet gap crossing into the Kaliningrad Corridor which would turn Russian positions in old East Prussia. Refighting the Battle of Tannenberg on the east European plain or Inchon in a Chinese Pacific Rim scenario will not come cheaply and could end in nuclear conflagration, thus diplomatic efforts (the "D" in DIME) must be exhausted before resorting to great power conflict. The West would require the remaining standing forces of the post-drawdown to bolster allied-centric coalitions until the United States could mobilize to fight a global war.

34. A strategy of exhaustion undermines the adversary's will to fight. See Robert Doughty et al., *Warfare in the Western World: Military Operations from 1600 to 1871*, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 456.

35. John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 1–28.

36. US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), *The US Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1 (Washington, DC: US Army TRADOC, 2018), vi–xii. This concept proposes detailed solutions to the specific problems posed by the militaries of post-industrial, information-based states like China and Russia. For USAF support, see USAF, *USAF Role in Joint All-Domain Operations*, Air Force Doctrine Note (AFDN) 1-20 (Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, AL: USAF, 2020), <https://www.dctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/Notes/Joint%20All-Domain%20Operations%20Doctrine--CSAF%20signed.pdf>.

37. Jack Watling, "The Key to Armenia's Tank Losses: The Sensors, Not the Shooters," *RUSI*, October 6, 2020, https://rusi.org/publication/rusi-defence-systems/key-armenia-tank-losses-sensors-not-shooters?fbclid=IwAR28GkxEp70_wph64a5s3J23hgRvvFqW7SXqsHqCANOIT8IYZJWwZxSzc.

Reducing and Reassigning Active Forces

The financial savings for a smaller standing establishment would be significant. Downsizing the Army's active divisions to 7 from 10 and active brigade combat teams (BCT) from 31 to 29 would reduce over 12,000 tactical-level personnel and still allow for 7 divisions at the outset of a conflict.³⁸ Besides the savings garnered by reducing recruiting, training (including transportation/fuel), equipping, medical support, housing and other family and personnel costs, it would also shrink BCT rotations through the training centers—one of the Army's biggest budget ticket items—from 20 to 14. The Army conducted 21 rotations in 2019 for a cost of approximately \$30 million each. By reducing the standing force by one Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT) and rotating only the six priority Infantry BCTs (IBCTs) through training the Army would save \$120 million.³⁹ This dividend can be minimally reinvested in professional education and assignment broadening for additional officers in fully staffed higher-echelon headquarters capable of operating across the conflict continuum.

The DoD must remake mobilization, building back bureaucratic mechanisms and structure to overturn the readiness posture that made mobilization seem unnecessary. Planning for military expansion was a priority in the small standing Army from its inception through World War II.⁴⁰ SFABs may be modified or even expanded to serve as mobilization platforms for the reduction considered here, which with the proper planning and infrastructure can rapidly reconstitute. During World War II, entire new infantry divisions were produced in one year, while it took over a year for brigades to be created during the Iraq "surge" after decades of neglect for mobilization processes.⁴¹ The "Total Force" concept of relying on the reserve component can also offset tactical risk while retaining an active cadre force structure and a practiced mobilization plan. The Army would preassign Individual Ready Reserve (IRR) personnel to active units with reserve-component training units expanding the training base during a mobilization crisis, while the active-component cadres man new brigades.

The other services would face a similar budgetary reckoning. The Navy faces not only cost overruns in its shipbuilding programs to replace an aging fleet but

38. John A. Bonin, Army Organization and Employment Data (working paper, last modified June 2021), Microsoft Word file.

39. Matthew Cox, "Army Focus on Combat Training Center Rotations 'Unsustainable,' General Says," Military.com, October 13, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/10/13/army-focus-combat-training-center-rotations-unsustainable-general-says.html>.

40. Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775–1945*, Department of the Army Pamphlet 20-212 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 1955).

41. John Bonin and Justin Magula, "U.S. Army Europe and Africa Headquarters: Reforming for Future Success," War on the Rocks, February 16, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/02/u-s-army-europe-and-africa-headquarters-reforming-for-future-success/>.

an overall lack of readiness with its surface force.⁴² Even with the advent of precision fires ensuring pinpoint missile accuracy against large formations such as carrier groups, the Navy retains 10 large-deck carrier groups.⁴³ Reassigning at least four of these legacy ships and their auxiliary armada into the naval reserve—would generate a sizeable cost savings. The Navy should convert its *America*-class amphibious helicopter assault ships to light carriers capable of carrying 20 short-takeoff-and-land F-35Bs. The Navy could reinvest some of the savings into a more employable short-deck carrier capable of supporting more F-35Bs and a dispersed fleet of precision-missile-carrying *Zumwalt*-class destroyers and littoral combat ships. Some of these platforms would autonomously operate and posture to survive Chinese missile salvos in the southern Pacific.⁴⁴ Increased use of *America*-class light carriers would also require transferring some, if not all, of the Marine Corps F-35Bs squadrons to the Navy with a corresponding reduction in Navy procurement of F-35Cs that are intended only for use on the now-reduced number of large-deck carriers.

Further, the DoD must undertake a complementary reduction of 50,000 in the proposed force structure of 170,000 Marines now only earmarked for amphibious operations. The Marine Corps *Force Design 2030* envisions eliminating capabilities for sustained land combat and reducing infantry battalions from 24 to 21 and expeditionary units from seven to five.⁴⁵ The Marines will add up to four littoral regiments. Since each of the regiments consists of only one infantry battalion and 1,800 to 2,000 total personnel, it is difficult to justify this proposed size for so little capability.⁴⁶ The Marine Corps is around 35 percent of the Army's size, but executes only a fraction of its missions. After 30 days ashore, the Army provides substantial support to the Marines except close air support.⁴⁷ To compensate for active reductions, the USMCR should expand to 45,000 personnel as the Marine's authorized third division/wing team of at least three infantry regiments.

42. David Sharp, "Navy Says It's Charting a New Course after Rash of Problems," AP, May 24, 2021, <https://apnews.com/article/europe-persian-gulf-tensions-navy-technology-health-5381d3dd9acf7af4498f18af6f516e6a>; and Kate Bachelier Odell, "If War Comes, Will the U.S. Navy Be Prepared?" *Wall Street Journal*, July 12, 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/if-war-comes-will-the-u-s-navy-be-prepared-11626041901>.

43. Bradley Bowman, Andrew Gabel, and Mikhael Smits, "Iran Attack Highlights US Missile Defense Vulnerability," *DefenseNews*, January 13, 2020, <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/01/13/iran-attack-highlights-us-missile-defense-vulnerability/>. China has more advanced systems than Iran.

44. Andrew Dyer, "Pentagon Adds 'Ghost Fleet' of Autonomous Ships to San Diego's Cutting-Edge Navy Squadron," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 12, 2021, <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/military/story/2021-06-12/ghost-fleet-autonomous-ships>.

45. Headquarters, Marine Corps (HQMC), *Force Design 2030* (Washington, DC: HQMC, 2020), 7.

46. David H. Berger, *Commandant's Planning Guidance: 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps* (Washington, DC: HQMC, 2019); and HQMC, *Force Design 2030*.

47. HQMC, *MAGTF Ground Operations*, Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 3-10 with Change 1 (Washington, DC: HQMC, 2018), A-3-A-7; and HQDA, *Theater Army, Corps, and Division Operations*, Field Manual 3-94 (Washington, DC: HQDA, 2014), 1-20.

The Air Force also maintains an excessive force structure, as the service struggles to redefine its warfighting paradigm for the twenty-first century.⁴⁸ A cut of 30,000 personnel is possible by adopting Army personnel practices, transitioning the remaining A-10 squadrons to the Air National Guard, and replacing aging fighters such as the F-16 with more and better drones.⁴⁹ Adopting Army force-structure practices could convert USAF squadrons with as few as 35 personnel commanded by a lieutenant colonel to flights commanded by a captain, and converting USAF groups with as few as 400 personnel and a colonel in command to squadrons with a lieutenant colonel in command.⁵⁰ Assigning the newly created Space Force to the Air Force would save redundant bureaucracy, while retaining a capable joint force Space Command.

The active Army would provision the enabling brigades needed for full multi-domain large-scale ground combat operations: aviation, fires, sustainment, protection, and information. The remaining four partial-cadre divisions, including the current 7th Infantry Division, could be rendered reduced authorized levels of organization. Each organization would maintain only two active BCTs with a reduced-strength cadre headquarters, and correspondingly, reduce assigned division troops. Area commands, such as Southern European Task Force and US Army Alaska, would be a new type of flexible operational command designed for competition and deterrence for prevention with both assigned and rotational units.⁵¹ Selected brigades from IBCTs would maintain only two active maneuver battalions and a third battalion in the Army National Guard. Infantry brigade combat teams could be employed for noncombatant evacuation operations, small-scale counterinsurgency, domestic/global defense support of civil authorities, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations.⁵² While SBCTs offer more protection, maneuverability, and strike capability than IBCTs, the Army should eliminate one of them, converting the Second Cavalry Regiment in Europe to an armored cavalry regiment. In total, this reduction equates to three BCTs and nine total infantry battalions. This would allow the Army to decrease by around 35,000 total personnel (including the 12,000 above), as well as an artificial intelligence/machine learning (AI/ML)-enabled reduction of over 2,000 intelligence and cyber personnel, while still compensating for the current and proposed reductions in USMC ground combat capability. At a Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

48. William Waddell, "Not Only Above But Among: American Airpower and Leadership into the Twenty-First Century," in *Landpower in the Long War: Projecting Force after 9/11*, ed. Jason W. Warren (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2019), 155–70.

49. Jacquelyn Schneider and Julia MacDonald, "Views from the Ground on the A-10 Debate," War on the Rocks, March 16, 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/03/views-from-the-ground-on-the-a-10-debate/>.

50. USAF Headquarters (HAF), *Manpower and Organization*, Air Force Instruction (AFI) 38-101 (Washington, DC: HAF, 2019), 74–76, 85.

51. Bonin, "Area Commands," July 2021.

52. Daniel Vazquez, "Is the Infantry Brigade Combat Team Becoming Obsolete?" War on the Rocks, April 17, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/04/is-the-infantry-brigade-combat-team-becoming-obsolete/>.

estimated cost of roughly \$107,000 per military personnel, the total personnel savings for a 165,000 cut in all service personnel is estimated to be \$17,655,000,000.⁵³ This does not include the *more* substantial additional cost savings in corresponding elimination of bases and equipment.

Another cost-saving measure that increases effectiveness is embracing AI/ML technology in place of some military personnel. The DoD has created the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center, however, there has been little operational integration of these promising technologies, especially in the realm of the information environment. For example, understanding the DoD information network—a federated network of networks that encompasses the entire Department of Defense (including the services and contractors) and its computer-related equipment—has predictably proven impossible to secure, operate, and defend.⁵⁴ Artificial intelligence/machine learning could replace some operational personnel in US Army Intelligence and Security Command’s major subordinates, while serving as the first line of security for the cyber terrain.⁵⁵ This proof of concept is especially important across the force because every piece of major equipment uses some element of technology vulnerable to cyber or radiological attacks, where US forces face disadvantages.⁵⁶ Instead of adding to the complexity of soldier tasks and increasing risk to mission, AI/ML employment can reduce risk by identifying threats and quarantining them more rapidly than human operators can.

Friendly forces should also employ AI/ML as the first line of defense against disinformation. Considering informational aspects are a central aspect of DIME (“I” in DIME). Cyber operations are almost always aimed at protecting or hampering information. Information also assumes a critical aspect in military operations—the reason for fighting and sacrificing—and the ability to generate, or reduce, morale rests on informational integrity and dissemination.

Moving into the Future

The DoD must study and understand the insights gleaned from its history of drawdowns, implement needed changes, and replace the readiness assumption for one of effectiveness. As in the past, a military leadership focused on education, training, technology, and strategic and doctrinal updates can create military capacity to operate successfully and effectively across a DIME

53. Katherine Blakeley, “Military Personnel,” Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, August 15, 2017, <https://csbaonline.org/reports/military-personnel>.

54. JCS, *Cyberspace Operations*, JP 3-12 (Washington, DC: JCS, 2018), viii.

55. See US Army Intelligence and Security Command (INSCOM), website, <http://www.inscom.army.mil>.

56. Marcus Clay, “To Rule the Invisible Battlefield: The Electromagnetic Spectrum and Chinese Military Power,” *War on the Rocks*, January 22, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/to-rule-the-invisible-battlefield-the-electromagnetic-spectrum-and-chinese-military-power/>.

framework within the current fiscal parameters. The US Armed Forces must also reinstitute a mixed-force structure of standing and cadre units and reduce the active force to recruitable levels. This move should incorporate allied officers before the shooting starts, integrate AI/ML to bolster OIE as well as new technologies in the space domain and precision fires, and promulgate revised strategy and doctrine that encompasses these changes and parallels the current Russian doctrinal framework. These alterations should support a periphery strategy to thwart China and Russia and allow time for national mobilization. Only with this reckoning will the US national security apparatus once again regain an affordable yet successful warfighting capacity that will help achieve national objectives.

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