

The 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative

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The 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Initiative

Since the U.S. Army's inception in 1775, it has reorganized or transformed its force structure on several occasions. These changes have occurred for a variety of reasons, such as shifting security requirements; to fight the nation's wars and conflicts; the introduction of new weapons, such as tanks and nuclear weapons; and budgetary considerations.

The Army has transformed its force structure on four major occasions since 2000:

- 2003: The Modular Army;
- 2012: Army Drawdown and Restructuring;
- 2017: Army Force Structure Decisions; and
- 2018: Army's AimPoint and Army 2030 Force Structure Initiatives.

On February 27, 2024, the Army publicly announced "changes to its force structure that will modernize and continue to transform the service to better face future threats. Under the plan, the Army will reorganize over the next decade to ensure it can deliver trained, cohesive and lethal forces to meet future challenges in increasingly complex operational environments." In conjunction with this announcement, the Army published *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*. In early 2025, it was reported the Army is further examining force structure and reconfigurations, with recommendations due to Army leadership in March 2024.

As part of this transformation, the Army plans to develop new

- Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTFs),
- Indirect Fire Protection Capability (IFPC) battalions,
- Counter-Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-sUAS) batteries, and
- Maneuver Short-Range Air Defense (M-SHORAD) battalions.

To transform its force structure, the Army plans to initiate a number of force structure reductions and, at the same time, undertake a number of actions to address recruiting challenges that directly affect the Army's ability to populate both existing and planned force structures. In addition to forces covered in its February 2024 white paper, the Army reportedly also plans to make force structure changes to its Combat Aviation Brigades (CABs).

Potential considerations for Congress include the national security implications of the Army's planned transformation; the new Trump Administration's national security priorities and strategy; the transformation of the Reserve Component; the total cost and duration of the transformation; and additional considerations, such as populating, equipping, and basing the new force structure.

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Importance to Congress

The Army’s 2024 proposal to significantly transform its force structure seeks to “build on the modernization and organizational shifts of recent years [and] ... enable the Army to bring in new capabilities to meet requirements under the National Defense Strategy.”¹

The proposal has national security implications that Congress may consider as part of its oversight and authorizations and appropriations role. For example, in terms of force size, Congress sets the endstrength² for both the Active and Reserve components of the Army. Congress also authorizes and appropriates funds needed for Army restructuring, training exercises, equipment, basing, and infrastructure.

In addition, the Army’s decision to transform its force structure may have an impact on Army bases located in Members’ districts or states, and it may have economic ramifications for communities around or near affected bases. The restructuring proposal may also have an impact on local and state defense-related industries. Furthermore, soldiers and their families who might be affected by the Army’s transformation decisions constitute a distinct element of Members’ constituencies.

Previous Army Reorganizations

Since the U.S. Army’s inception in 1775, it has reorganized or transformed its forces many times. These changes have occurred for various reasons, such as shifting security requirements; to fight the nation’s wars and conflicts; the introduction of new weapons, such as tanks and nuclear weapons; and budgetary considerations. According to one study, from 1939 to the mid-1980s, the Army conducted at least 11 reviews of its structure and organization, which oftentimes led to force structure changes.³ After World War II and the Korean War, the Army transformed and reorganized to meet the growing Soviet and Warsaw Pact threat. The Army transformed again after the Cold War ended in 1991. In a more contemporary context, the Army has transformed its force structure on four major occasions since 2000, as briefly described in the following sections. The **text box** below describes the current levels of organization and command of U.S. Army units.

¹ *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

² Each year, Congress authorizes in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) the number of military members in every Service and component; this number is known as endstrength. As noted in CRS Insight IN11994, *FY2023 NDAA: Active Component End-Strength*, authorized strength means “the largest number of members authorized to be in an armed force, a component, a branch, a grade, or any other category of the armed forces” (10 U.S.C. §101(b)(11)). Authorized endstrengths are maximum strength levels as of September 30, the end of the fiscal year.

³ U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Combat Studies Institute, “Sixty Years of Reorganizing for Combat: A Historical Trend Analysis,” 1999, p. 1.

Levels of Organization and Command of U.S. Army Units (Smallest to Largest)

Squad/Section: A squad is commanded by a sergeant and has four to 12 personnel. A section is a group of vehicles, generally two in number.

Platoon: A platoon is commanded by a second lieutenant and includes varying numbers of subordinate squads or sections. It has 16 to 50 personnel.

Company/Troop/Battery: A company is commanded by a captain and includes two to five subordinate platoons (usually three or four). It has about 60 to 200 personnel. Cavalry companies are called troops; artillery companies are called batteries.

Battalion/Squadron: A battalion is commanded by a lieutenant colonel and usually includes three to five combat companies and one support company. It has about 400 to 1,000 personnel. Cavalry battalions are called squadrons.

Brigade Combat Team/Support Brigade/Regiment/Group: A brigade is commanded by a colonel and is generally configured as either a brigade combat team (BCT) or a support brigade. A BCT has about 4,000 to 4,700 personnel, depending on whether it is an armored, Stryker, or infantry BCT. Cavalry brigades are called regiments; some types of support brigades are called groups.

Division: A division is commanded by a major general and includes two to five BCTs (usually four), an aviation brigade, an artillery brigade, an engineer brigade, and a logistics brigade. Divisions have about 12,000 to 16,000 personnel.

Corps: A corps is commanded by a lieutenant general and includes two to five divisions and numerous support brigades and commands.

Army: An army is the highest command level in a given theater of operations and typically has 100,000 to 300,000 personnel. It is an element of a joint command structure—the Army's component is commanded by a general.

Theater: An operational theater is established to support one or more corps (usually two) and includes numerous support brigades and support commands.

Source: This information is taken directly from the Congressional Budget Office, *The U.S. Military's Force Structure: A Primer*, 2021 Update, May 2021, p. 19.

2003: The Modular Army⁴

In 2003, with the Active and Reserve Components of the Army involved in long-term combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army initiated a total force modular reorganization to “better meet the challenges of the 21st century security environment and, specifically, jointly fight and win the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT).”⁵ The Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA) described the Army modular force initiative as a “major transformational effort involving the total redesign of the operational Army (all components) into a larger, more powerful, more flexible and more rapidly deployable force while moving the Army from a division-centric structure to one built around a brigade combat team (BCT).”⁶ By adopting modularity, the Army hoped, among other things, to (1) increase the rotational pool of ready units by at least 50%, (2) design units that would require less augmentation when deployed (reducing the requirement for ad hoc organizations), and (3) reduce stress on the force through a more predictable deployment cycle. Modular redesign required significant organizational changes in terms of personnel, equipment, and basing of units. Army modularity was costly. In 2006, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) noted that “the Army’s cost estimate for completing modular force restructuring by 2011

⁴ For additional information on Army Modularity, see CRS Report RL32476, *U.S. Army's Modular Redesign: Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

⁵ Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2005, January 15, 2005, p. 9.

⁶ Association of the U.S. Army, “Torchbearer National Security Report - A Modular Force for the 21st Century,” March 15, 2005, p. 3.

has grown from an initial rough order of magnitude of \$28 billion in 2004 to \$52.5 billion currently.”⁷

2012 Army Drawdown and Restructuring⁸

In January 2012, the Department of Defense (DOD) unveiled new defense strategy guidance based on a review of potential future security challenges and budgetary constraints.⁹ The new strategy guidance envisioned a smaller, leaner Army that would be agile, flexible, rapidly deployable, and technologically advanced. The new strategy guidance was intended to rebalance the Army’s global posture and presence, emphasizing where potential problems were likely to arise, such as the Asia-Pacific region and the Middle East.

As part of this strategy, active component Army endstrength was to shrink from 570,000 in 2010 to 490,000 by the end of 2017. As part of this reduction, the Army would no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, protracted stability operations but would continue to be a full-spectrum force capable of addressing a wide range of national security challenges. In June 2013, the Army announced it would cut 12 BCTs from the Army’s 35 Active Component (AC) BCTs, as well as a number of unspecified support and headquarters units. In addition, Army National Guard (ARNG) BCTs were to be restructured in a similar fashion. As part of the drawdown of 12 active duty BCTs, two armored BCTs were removed from Europe.

2017 Army Force Structure Decisions¹⁰

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 (P.L. 114-328) authorized the Army to maintain an endstrength of 1.018 million Active and Reserve Component soldiers, an increase over previous programmed plans to reduce the total Army to 980,000. The endstrength increase was intended to “begin to address and reduce the capabilities gap against near-peer, high-end adversaries; reduce modernization gaps; and improve readiness in existing units.”¹¹ With this increase in total Army endstrength, the Army initiated a series of force structure changes, including the following:

- Adding additional soldiers to units that were deploying on operations so that those units had 100% of their authorized personnel available.
- Assigning additional soldiers to the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) to address manpower shortfalls in initial basic soldier training units and recruiting commands.
- Retaining a number of units previously slated for deactivation, including the 4th Infantry Brigade Combat Team (IBCT) (Airborne) of the 25th Infantry Division based at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, and a Combat Aviation Brigade in South Korea.

⁷ United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, “Force Structure Capabilities and Cost of Army Modular Force Remain Uncertain,” GAO-06-548T, April 4, 2006.

⁸ Information in this section is taken from CRS Report R42493, *Army Drawdown and Restructuring: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

⁹ Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, January 2012.

¹⁰ Information in this section is taken from CRS In Focus IF10678, *Army FY2017 Force Structure Decisions*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹¹ U.S. Army War College Archives News Article, “U.S. Army Announces Force Structure Decisions for Fiscal Year 2017,” June 15, 2017.

- Creating new units and converting existing units into new units, including
 - converting the 2nd IBC, 3rd Infantry Division at Ft. Stewart, Georgia, into an Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT);
 - creating two Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs),¹² one in the Active Component and one in the ARNG;
 - creating an aviation training brigade at Ft. Cavazos (formerly known as Ft. Hood), Texas;
 - creating three Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) battalions to be stationed overseas; and
 - creating a Short-Range Air Defense (SHORAD) battalion.¹³

2018 Army's AimPoint and Army 2030 Force Structure Initiatives¹⁴

In 2018, the Army unveiled the concept of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) in response to the 2018 National Defense Strategy, which shifted from the previous focus of U.S. national security of countering violent extremists worldwide to confronting revisionist powers—primarily Russia and China.¹⁵ The primary means by which the Army intended to build its MDO capability was through what it called the AimPoint Force Structure Initiative. AimPoint was to be a flexible force structure, with little change expected at brigade level and below, but with major changes at higher echelons—division, corps, and theater command. Under AimPoint, headquarters at higher levels would be developed and existing ones would be modified to build back a campaign capability (i.e., adding additional staff, specialists, capabilities, and units) to compete with near-peer adversaries and to employ information warfare and operate in the cyber and space domains.

As part of AimPoint, in February 2020 the Army announced the activation of a new corps headquarters, designated Fifth Corps (V Corps), located at Fort Knox, KY, with a rotational forward presence in Poland. The Army began the creation of five Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTFs),¹⁶ with the mission to penetrate enemy environments by employing assets to counter enemy anti-access/area denial (A2/AD)¹⁷ capabilities and enemy network-focused targeting of

¹² For additional information on Security Force Assistance Brigades, see CRS In Focus IF10675, *Army Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs)*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹³ For additional information on Army Short-Range Air Defense (SHORAD), see CRS Report R46463, *U.S. Army Short-Range Air Defense Force Structure and Selected Programs: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹⁴ Information in this section is taken from CRS In Focus IF11542, *The Army's AimPoint and Army 2030 Force Structure Initiatives*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹⁵ For additional information on Multi-Domain Operations (MDO), see CRS In Focus IF11409, *Defense Primer: Army Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹⁶ For additional information on Multi-Domain Task Forces, see CRS In Focus IF11797, *The Army's Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF)*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹⁷ Anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) has been described as any action, activity, or capability, usually long-range, designed to prevent an advancing military force from entering an operational area. Area denial is defined as action, activity, or capability, usually short-range, designed to limit an adversarial force's freedom of action within an operational area. In terms of weapon systems, threat A2/AD defenses are envisioned as comprising layered and integrated long-range precision-strike systems, littoral anti-ship capabilities, air defenses, and long-range artillery and rocket systems.

U.S. units. Also, under AimPoint, the Army began developing long-range precision fires systems and units.¹⁸

In January 2022, the Army redesignated AimPoint to “Army 2030.” Under Army 2030, the Army envisioned redesignating existing divisions or creating new divisions into five types of divisions:

- Standard Light,
- Standard Heavy,
- Penetration,
- Joint Force Entry Air Assault, and
- Joint Force Entry Airborne.

February 2024 Army Force Structure Transformation Announcement

On February 27, 2024, the Army announced “changes to its force structure that will modernize and continue to transform the service to better face future threats. Under the plan, the Army will reorganize over the next decade to ensure it can deliver trained, cohesive and lethal forces to meet future challenges in increasingly complex operational environments.”¹⁹ In conjunction with this announcement, the Army published *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*.²⁰ This white paper is summarized and discussed in the following sections.

Background²¹

The Army contends that for “nearly twenty years the Army’s force structure reflected a focus on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations that dominated after the 9/11 attacks.” While the Army will likely continue to need these capabilities “in light of the changing security environment and evolving character of war, the Army is refocusing on conducting large-scale combat operations against technologically advanced military powers.” To accomplish this, the Army plans to “generate new capabilities and re-balance its force structure.”

Accomplishing the Transformation²²

Prior to announcing its proposal to transform the Army force structure, the Army conducted a year-long Total Army Analysis (TAA)²³—a “a rigorous assessment of its force structure.” The

¹⁸ For examples of these systems, see CRS In Focus IF12135, *The U.S. Army’s Typhon Strategic Mid-Range Fires (SMRF) System*, by Andrew Feickert, and CRS In Focus IF11991, *The U.S. Army’s Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW): Dark Eagle*, by Andrew Feickert.

¹⁹ U.S. Army Public Affairs, “Army Changes Force Structure for Future Warfighting Operations,” February 27, 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/274003/army_changes_force_structure_for_future_warfighting_operations.

²⁰ *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2024/02/27/091989c9/army-white-paper-army-force-structure-transformation.pdf>.

²¹ Quoted information in this section is taken from *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

²² Ibid.

²³ The Total Army Analysis (TAA) is an analytical process used to determine the numbers and types of units the Army will need in the future for all Army Components (Active and Reserve). It establishes the basis for Army activities such as resource allocation, personnel management, equipment procurement, and operational planning. The TAA is also the basis for the Army’s program objective memorandum (POM) and budget submission that are provided to Congress.

Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation states that the Army consulted extensively with Congress and, on this basis, “Army leaders are moving forward with a significant force structure transformation,” which implies some unspecified form of congressional approval of the Army’s transformation plans.

At present, Army AC force structure is designed to accommodate 494,000 soldiers but AC endstrength is set by FY2024 law (P.L. 118-31) at 445,000 soldiers. Based on the TAA, the Army plans to bring the authorized troop level of 494,000 down to 470,000 by FY2029. The Army intends to cut 24,000 authorizations, or spaces, in order to add 7,500 new spaces to support a series of new capabilities. By reducing authorizations, the Army intends “to shrink excess, largely unmanned hollow force structure and build new formations equipped with new capabilities needed for large scale combat operations.” The Army contends it is “currently significantly over-structured, meaning there are not enough soldiers to fill out existing units and organizations.” With the addition of 7,500 authorizations needed to bring new capabilities into the force, the Army needed to identify some 32,000 authorizations across the rest of the force that could be phased out.

The Army white paper emphasizes that reductions are to authorizations or “spaces,” not “faces” (i.e., individual soldiers). The Army does not plan to force soldiers out of the Army, and the white paper notes “that with planned end strength increases over the next few years, many installations could potentially see an increase in the number of soldiers stationed there.”

New Capabilities²⁴

The Army white paper cites four types of units designed to provide new capability. The Army may plan to establish other types of units as part of the transformation initiative, but the white paper does not discuss them. Some of these units could support new weapon systems being developed by the Army, such as the M-10 Booker,²⁵ which is described as a light tank intended to support Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs), or the Army’s Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW).²⁶ The four new types of units, which the Army calls “a representative sample of the Army’s full capability growth,” are described below.

Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTFs)²⁷

The Army is in the process of establishing five MDTFs. MDTFs are designed to protect Joint and Coalition forces, conduct intelligence gathering and synchronization, deliver non-kinetic space and cyber effects to shape operations, and deliver long-range fires in support of joint force maneuver. They are theater-level assets that include a headquarters and headquarters battalion, a multi-domain effects battalion, a long-range fires battalion, an indirect fire protection capability (IFPC) battalion, and a brigade support battalion. The Army intends to “complete the build out”

²⁴ *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

²⁵ For additional information on the M-10 Booker, see CRS In Focus IF11859, *The Army’s M-10 Booker (Formerly Known as Mobile Protected Firepower [MPF]) System*, by Andrew Feickert.

²⁶ For additional information on the Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW), see CRS In Focus IF11991, *The U.S. Army’s Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW): Dark Eagle*, by Andrew Feickert.

²⁷ For additional information on Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTFs), see CRS In Focus IF11797, *The Army’s Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF)*, by Andrew Feickert.

of these five MDTFs, likely meaning bringing these organizations up to their fully authorized strengths.²⁸

Indirect Fire Protection Capability (IFPC) Battalions²⁹

The Army plans to establish four additional IFPC battalions. IFPC units “provide a short to medium-range capability to defend against unmanned aerial systems, cruise missiles, rockets, artillery and mortars.”³⁰

Counter-Small Unmanned Aerial Systems (C-sUAS) Batteries³¹

The Army plans to establish nine new C-sUAS batteries. These units are to be incorporated into IFPC and division air defense battalions and will likely employ a variety of systems, technologies, and techniques to counter the growing small UAS threat.

Maneuver Short-Range Air Defense (M-SHORAD) Battalions³²

The Army plans to establish four additional M-SHORAD battalions. These units “counter low altitude aerial threats, including UAS, rotary wing aircraft, and fixed wing aircraft.”³³

Force Structure Reductions³⁴

To identify force structure reductions, the Army employed a multifaceted approach to realign and resize the force. The Army “looked carefully at each military occupational specialty, and examined each skill set and functional area for efficiencies.” In one example, the Army reallocated BCT-level counterinsurgency-focused engineer force structure to the division level, thereby “allowing the Army to reduce the overall number of engineer positions while giving division and corps commanders flexibility to concentrate assets as necessary during large scale combat operations.” The Army notes that by identifying efficiencies in other types of units, it was able to reduce its authorizations by almost 10,000 spaces.

The Army further noted it reduced 2,700 authorizations

[b]ased on modeling that included factors such as demand over time, capacity to meet National Defense Strategy requirements and past deployment stress. Units that deploy infrequently or not at all pointed to areas where the Army could reduce manning authorizations within a formation at minimal risk. The Army will also decrease the number

²⁸ Quoted information in this section is taken from *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

²⁹ For additional information on indirect fire protection capability (IFPC), see CRS In Focus IF12421, *The U.S. Army’s Indirect Fire Protection Capability (IFPC) System*, by Andrew Feickert.

³⁰ Quoted information in this section is taken from *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

³¹ Ibid.

³² For additional information on M-SHORAD, see CRS In Focus IF12397, *U.S. Army’s Maneuver Short-Range Air Defense (M-SHORAD) System*, by Andrew Feickert.

³³ Quoted information in this section is taken from *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

³⁴ Ibid.

of transients, trainees, holdees and students (TTHS)³⁵ by approximately 6,300 authorizations as it resizes for a 470,000 soldier Regular Army.³⁶

The majority of additional reductions “resulted from adjustments to the close combat forces” and targeted legacy formations that had “previously been sized and structured for soldier-intensive COIN operations.” These reductions included

- inactivation of cavalry squadrons in continental U.S.-based Stryker brigade combat teams and infantry brigade combat teams;
- conversion of infantry brigade combat team weapons companies to platoons, and,
- elimination of some positions across Regular [Active Component] Army Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs).³⁷

These force structure reductions accounted for roughly 10,000 additional reductions in authorizations.

The Army also intends to reduce Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF)³⁸ The white paper states

Working closely with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict and U.S. Special Operations Command, the Secretary of Defense determined the Army could reduce Army special operations forces by approximately 3,000 authorizations.... Positions and headquarters elements that are historically vacant or hard to fill will be prioritized for reduction.³⁹

Transformation Under Contact

The Army’s force structure transformation initiative is part of what the Army calls “Transformation Under Contact,” which is further described as follows:

Transforming in contact is not just for network experimentation; it is part of a larger Army initiative that is also evaluating electronic warfare, counter-unmanned aerial systems and how personnel and tactics align with technologies. Driven by Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy A. George and other senior leaders, the transforming in contact effort spans regions and theaters in Europe, the Pacific and the Middle East as well as the continental U.S. In addition to FORSCOM units, the Army’s Centers of Excellence and program executive offices, as well as cross-functional teams from the Army Futures Command and other stakeholders are participating in these assessments to quickly translate operational feedback into action.⁴⁰

³⁵ According to the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA), “The Army uses the term Trainees, Transients, Holdees and Students (TTHS) to represent soldiers not assigned to units. The active Army’s total strength is divided between the Force Structure Allowance (FSA)—the total of all authorized positions in units—and TTHS. While TTHS is a target and not a limit, Army policy decisions influence its size and composition.” See <https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/LPE-04-7-TTHS-is-Not-a-Four-Letter-Word.pdf>.

³⁶ Quoted information in this section is taken from *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

³⁷ For additional information on Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs), see CRS In Focus IF10675, *Army Security Force Assistance Brigades (SFABs)*, by Andrew Feickert.

³⁸ For additional information on Army Special Operations Forces (ARSOF), see CRS Report RS21048, *U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF): Background and Considerations for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

³⁹ *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

⁴⁰ U.S. Army, “Transforming in Contact,” https://www.army.mil/article/278935/transforming_in_contact#:~:text=Transforming%20in%20contact%20is%20not,Army%20Chief%20of%20Staff%20Gen, accessed January 30, 2025.

Addressing Recruiting Challenges

It has been widely acknowledged⁴¹ that “the U.S. military faces its most severe recruiting crisis since the inception of the all-volunteer force (AVF) in 1973, posing a risk to the Army and to U.S. national security.”⁴² One report notes,

In FY2022, the Army fell 15,000 short of its goal of 60,000 recruits in the active component (25 percent). The service missed its ambitious recruiting goal of 65,000 Soldiers in FY2023 by 10,000. In FY 2022, the Army cut its active-duty endstrength to 466,000 and the FY 2023 budget funded an active duty Army endstrength of 452,000—the smallest since before World War II.⁴³

On September 26, 2024, the Army announced it had

[e]xceeded fiscal year 2024 recruiting goals for the Active Component. The Army will achieve at least 55,300 total accessions for FY2024 and will place approximately 11,000 soldiers in the Delayed Entry Program for FY2025.⁴⁴

While the Army’s FY2024 recruiting goals were exceeded, and it seems that with improved Delayed Entry Program numbers in FY2025, Army recruiting for FY2025 appears encouraging, it should be noted that recruiting is a year-to-year activity and numerous factors influence recruiting. As such, it remains to be seen if improvements in Army recruiting can be sustained in the near and long term.

Acknowledging and addressing the Army’s recruiting challenges, the Army white paper states

Concurrent with its force structure transformation, the Army is undertaking a similarly important transformation of its recruiting enterprise so that it can man units sufficiently, continue to bring the right types and amounts of new talent into the Army and rebuild its overall end strength. The Army must solve its recruiting challenges to successfully transform for the future.⁴⁵

The Army’s recruiting transformation involves

- continuing the Soldier Referral Program and the Future Soldier Prep Course, which has brought more than 14,000 new soldiers into the Army since its inception in 2022;
- professionalizing its recruiting workforce, starting with the creation of its first class of recruiting warrant officers and creating a new recruiting military occupational specialty and selecting, training, and assigning recruiters far differently than in the past;
- creating a significant experimentation capability within U.S. Recruiting Command and its five recruiting brigades to quickly identify and scale up

⁴¹ See David Vergun, “DOD Addresses Recruiting Shortfall Challenges,” DOD News, December 13, 2023; Ellen Mitchell, “Army Revamps Recruiting in Face of Enlistment Shortfalls,” *The Hill*, October 3, 2023; Joe Lacdan, “Army Leaders Implement Measures to Bolster Recruiting,” *Army News Service*, September 12, 2002; and LTC Frank Dolberry and Charles McEnany, “Be All You Can Be: The U.S. Army’s Recruiting Transformation,” Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA), January 22, 2024.

⁴² LTC Frank Dolberry and Charles McEnany, “Be All You Can Be: The U.S. Army’s Recruiting Transformation,” Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA), January 22, 2024.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ U.S. Army, “Army Exceeds FY 2024 Active Duty Recruiting Goals,” https://www.army.mil/article/280028/army_exceeds_fy_2024_active_duty_recruiting_goals, accessed January 30, 2025.

⁴⁵ *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

- promising new approaches and discard recruiting practices no longer successful in a competitive and rapidly changing labor market;
- elevating the U.S. Army Recruiting Command to a three-star command that will oversee recruiting brigades, the Army Cadet Command, and the Army's Enterprise Marketing Office; and
- having the U.S. Army Recruiting Command report directly to the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army in light of the command's critically important mission.⁴⁶

Summary

The *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation* constitutes formal public disclosure of its future plans for force structure changes and the recruiting initiatives needed to support those proposed changes. It remains to be seen if the Army will release additional details on transformation, or if future global strategic developments will influence the configuration, scope, and execution of the Army's transformation plans.

2024 Army Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) Force Structure Changes

While not specifically addressed in the Army's February 2024 white paper, the Army reportedly plans to convert Combat Aviation Brigades (CABs) to a previously used customized force structure as opposed to the current modular CAB force structure construct adopted in the early 2000s. Reportedly, during an April 2024 Army Aviation Association of America's meeting, Army leadership outlined their plans,⁴⁷ which include the following changes:

- the 12th CAB based in Europe, which had been functioning as a partial CAB, is to be brought up to full strength;
- new CABs are to be customized to division types (light and heavy);
- the Army plans to dedicate additional UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopters in light divisions by taking some of those Black Hawks out of heavy divisions;
- the 101st Airborne Division is to receive an extra battalion of 32 CH-47F Chinook cargo helicopters to support air assault operations;
- the Army plans to establish a total of eight heavy CABs and four CABs in the Active Component;
- seven of the heavy CABs are to be established for the 1st Cavalry Division, the 1st Infantry Division, 2nd Infantry Division, 3rd Infantry Division, 4th Infantry Division, 16th Combat Aviation Brigade, and the 12th Combat Aviation Brigade; and
- three of the light CABs are to be established for the 10th Mountain Division, the 25th Infantry Division, and the 82nd Airborne Division, with the fourth light CAB being part of the 101st Airborne Division.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Information in this section is taken directly from *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

⁴⁷ Jen Judson, "US Army to Shift Aviation Force Structure Back to Tailored Brigades," *Defense News*, April 25, 2024.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

It is not known if these proposed changes are applicable to the Army Reserve Component. Reportedly, the aforementioned conversions are planned to begin in 2024 and be completed by the fall of 2029.⁴⁹ According to an Army official, “the bulk of the work is expected to occur in 2027 when hundreds of aircraft transfers are expected.”⁵⁰

Reportedly, on August 8, 2024, the Army activated the Arctic Aviation Command at Fort Wainwright, Alaska.⁵¹ The Arctic Aviation Command is intended to provide command and control for the 11th Airborne Division’s 1st Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment and the 1st Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment, which are also stationed in Alaska. The new command reportedly

means that the leaders of the units will be local in Alaska to manage training, mitigate risk, and provide a direct line of support to the division. There are no plans to expand the size or number of aviation units in Alaska. It also means new equipment and ideas for cold-weather flyers. The Alaska units already have upgraded the heaters inside some helicopters and have installed windscreens for door gunners to avoid the sub-zero windchill.⁵²

2025 Army Force Structure Activities

Reportedly, the Army is “getting ready to move out on its plan to cut force structure and reconfigure some units.”⁵³ It was also noted that “Army Training and Doctrine Command [TRADOC] is due to provide feedback to top leadership in March that will help inform the Army’s new force design.”⁵⁴ It is not known if the new Trump Administration’s national security priorities will influence or affect the Army’s force structure transformation initiatives. Reportedly the Chief of Staff of the Army, General Randy George, has said the Army will need to make “tough choices about the budget” in the next year, and the Army is

[l]ooking at everything that we do when it comes to return on investment in terms of lethality and readiness inside of our formation and then taking care of our soldiers. Those are the areas that things should fit in, and if they don’t, we’re going to have to make some tough choices.⁵⁵

While General George’s comments refer primarily to programs, including weapon systems, it is also possible that budgetary considerations might also influence planned force structure transformation initiatives.

Potential Considerations for Congress

The Army’s plans to transform force structure over the next few years raises several potential congressional considerations.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Brian Everstine, “U.S. Army Overhauling Aviation Force Structure,” *Aviation Week Network*, April 26, 2024.

⁵¹ Patty Nieberg, “Army Activates Arctic Aviation Command for Extreme Cold Flying, *Task and Purpose*, August 20, 2024.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Meghann Myers, “Army’s Hurry-Up Force-Design Ideas are Due in March, Chief Says,” *Defense One*, January 29, 2025.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Dan Schere, “Hard Choices Ahead for Army When it Comes to Budget, Service Chief Says,” *Inside Defense*, January 29, 2025.

National Security Implications

The Army’s white paper cites the evolving character of war as one of the reasons why the Army needs to transform. Noted Prussian strategist Carl von Clausewitz in his 1832 *On War* describes the nature of war as “a violent contest of wills to achieve political aims,” and this assertion remains largely uncontested by contemporary strategic thinkers. Many contemporary defense experts suggest that the character of war—how, where, with what weapons, and technologies wars are fought—is changing rapidly.⁵⁶ As written, the Army white paper appears to address the “character of war” by emphasizing technology-based, non-kinetic space and cyber effects, long-range precision fires, force protection, and Security Force Assistance more than it does traditional conventional close-combat force and Army Special Operations Forces capabilities. The reduction in the aforementioned capabilities may have national security implications, such as the inability to conduct certain operations because of reduced unit capability or added stress on the force resulting from fewer available SFAB soldiers, special operations soldiers, and soldiers from other units not mentioned in the Army’s white paper—all of which could merit further examination by Congress.

New Trump Administration’s National Security Priorities and Strategy

The new Trump Administration’s national security priorities could influence the Army’s 2024 plans to transform force structure. Furthermore, a new National Security Strategy is expected to be issued, which will also affect the current National Defense and National Military Strategy. It is possible that these strategies might also have an impact on the Army’s 2024 force structure transformation plans. As the new Administration’s national security priorities and strategies are enacted, Congress might consider and examine how these influence or possibly modify the Army’s original 2024 force structure transformation plans.

Transformation of the Reserve Component?

In 2018, the Army Strategy stated that

[t]he Army Strategy articulates how the Total Army achieves its objectives defined by the Army Vision and fulfills its Title 10 duties. Its primary inputs are the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and National Military Strategy.⁵⁷

Despite stating that the proposed force structure transformation is necessary to “bring in new capabilities to meet requirements under the National Defense Strategy,” the Army white paper focuses almost exclusively on the Active Component. The white paper cites the Total Army Analysis, which traditionally determines the numbers and types of Active and Reserve units, as underpinning the Army’s planned transformation. The Army does not explain why the transformation plan omits the Reserve Component. In a similar manner, it is not known how or if reported Army CAB force structure changes will affect the Reserve Component. Without an explanation, a reader could infer that Reserve Component force structure is adequate or that the

⁵⁶ For example, see Dr. T.X. Hammes, “The Changing Character of War,” National Defense University, <https://keystone.ndu.edu/Portals/86/Future%20of%20Conflict.pdf>, accessed February 5, 2025; U.S. Naval Institute, “The Character of War Is Constantly Changing,” May 2022, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2022/may/character-war-constantly-changing>, accessed February 5, 2025; Modern War Institute, “Unmasking War’s Changing Character,” March 12, 2019, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/unmasking-wars-changing-character/>, accessed February 5, 2025.

⁵⁷ The Army Strategy, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the_army_strategy_2018.pdf, accessed March 8, 2024.

Reserve Component does not play a prominent role in supporting the National Defense Strategy. To address this ambiguity, Congress might seek greater clarification from Army leadership on the expectations for the Reserve Component in its plans to transform force structure.

Total Cost of Transformation

As previously noted, force structure transformation can be an expensive undertaking. Furthermore, force structure changes are rarely long term, as emerging strategic challenges, new technologies, and availability of resources can necessitate additional force structure changes. For example, as part of Army 2030, the Army announced in 2022 that it was

[s]hifting its organizational focus to larger formations that are more capable of working with our sister services, allies and partners around the globe. Theater armies, corps and divisions will gain the personnel, organizations and equipment they need to disrupt and defeat an adversary's ability to achieve their objectives.⁵⁸

The 2022 shift in organizational focus essentially reverted the Army back to the force structure that existed prior to the Army's costly 2003 Modular Force Structure Initiative. In a similar manner, reported Army CAB force structure changes will essentially revert CAB force structure back to its pre-2003 configuration.

Because major force structure changes involve a variety of costs, some of which can be substantial and affect other planned Army initiatives, a total estimated cost for the Army's 2024 Force Structure Transformation, as well as proposed CAB force structure changes, is arguably essential for effective congressional oversight. Without such an estimate, the Army's transformation plans are essentially an open-ended commitment, and Congress does not have a reliable cost benchmark with which to make informed decisions on Army funding.

Transformation Timeline

The *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation* establishes a plan for personnel-related initiatives by FY2029, but it does not address in any level of detail a timeline for transforming the force structure. Based on reports and statements from the Army, some of these force structure changes have already occurred.⁵⁹ But for other units, a timeline for transformation—whether for reducing current force structure or establishing new units—is not widely known.⁶⁰ As with the case of an estimated total cost, a detailed understanding of the Army's planned transformation timeline could prove beneficial to effective congressional oversight of the Army's Transformation Initiative and proposed CAB force structure changes.

Other Transformation Considerations

Though not addressed in great detail in the Army white paper, there are other matters related to the transformation that Congress might consider in the context of congressional oversight.

⁵⁸ Army of 2030, <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2022/10/06/4632c205/army-2030-information-paper.pdf>, accessed March 8, 2024.

⁵⁹ The Army Strategy, https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/the_army_strategy_2018.pdf, accessed March 8, 2024.

⁶⁰ See for example Jordan Allen, "M-SHORAD System Bolsters Army's Air Defense Capabilities," *Army News Service*, April 23, 2021, and Jen Judson, "U.S. Army's Air Defense Modernization Boss on Missiles, Machine Learning," *Defense News*, March 8, 2024.

Populating Force Structure

It is one thing to establish the authorizations for new and existing units discussed in the Army's white paper, yet another to fill those authorizations with qualified soldiers. Army units are composed of officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted soldiers. When soldiers enlist in the Army, they choose their military occupational specialty (MOS) subject to their performance on standardized aptitude tests and the aptitude requirements of their desired branch. In many cases, a soldier might want to enlist for a certain technical specialty but not have the aptitude scores required for that MOS. Generally speaking, many of the units described in the transformation white paper, such as MDTFs and air and missile defense units, have high aptitude requirements because of their highly technical nature. Such aptitude requirements could further limit the Army's ability to fully populate those units. Plans calling for "completing the build out" of already existing MDTFs could be due in part to not having enough soldiers in highly technical MOSs needed to serve in MDTFs. To better understand this potential limitation, Congress could explore with the Army how aptitude requirements could affect the ability to populate current and new force structure.

A related issue is the Army's "recruiting crisis." Although the Army white paper lays out steps to rectify the problem, it does not address what could happen to the Army's transformation aspirations if recruiting does not improve or worsens. While the Army exceeded its 2024 Active Component recruiting goals,⁶¹ it remains to be seen if this will continue in future years. As the Army has stated, additional endstrength will be required to meet its transformation objectives. In this regard, Congress could discuss with the Army its contingency plans in the event that recruiting does not improve or gets worse.

Equipping New Force Structure

The *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation* discusses a variety of new units being fielded; undoubtedly, additional units will also be created as part of this initiative. Some units, such as LRHW batteries and Directed Energy (DE) SHORAD units, do not have mature weapons and technologies. Furthermore, all units require different types of equipment, including radars and vehicles for transportation and support. Given the many challenges of equipping new units, Congress could explore with the Army its plans for equipping units over time. Such an examination might include when the Army's new units are planned to achieve Initial Operational Capability (IOC) and when they are expected to reach Full Operational Capability (FOC). Another issue for discussion could be whether the Army is experiencing any specific equipment-related developmental and production problems that could affect IOC and FOC, and whether Congress might be able to assist in addressing these issues.

New Force Structure Basing

The Army's white paper references elements of MDTFs being stationed overseas and forward deployed and notes that "most installations will likely see an increase in the number of soldiers actually stationed there." Beyond those two references, little is said regarding the basing of new force structure.⁶²

⁶¹ U.S. Army, "Army Exceeds FY 2024 Active Duty Recruiting Goals," https://www.army.mil/article/280028/army_exceeds_fy_2024_active_duty_recruiting_goals, accessed January 30, 2025.

⁶² *Army White Paper: Army Force Structure Transformation*, February 27, 2024.

Basing of Army units, whether overseas or in the United States, has potential oversight implications for Congress. New units might require additional Military Construction (MILCON) funds to possibly include additional base housing or medical facilities. Furthermore, although additional units, soldiers, and families on a base also can have a positive economic impact on local communities, they can also put increased burdens on public services and infrastructure (e.g., schools, transport systems). Conversely, for bases that lose soldiers and family members as part of force structure transformation, those losses could have consequences for the base and the local community that would be of interest to Congress.

In the past, Congress has authorized BRAC, or Base Realignment and Closure, which was “used to reorganize its base structure to more efficiently and effectively support our forces, increase operational readiness and facilitate new ways of doing business.”⁶³ To enhance oversight of force structure-related basing, Congress might benefit from a detailed basing plan that specifies which bases are expected to receive new units, as well as which bases are slated to lose force structure. Such a plan could address base-specific timelines, especially if actions need to be taken by Congress to authorize base realignments resulting from force structure changes, negotiations required to be undertaken with host nations for new units planned for overseas basing, as well as any other issues that could have an impact on the Army’s domestic and overseas basing plans.

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⁶³ From the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition & Sustainment Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC), <https://www.acq.osd.mil/brac/#:~:text=BRAC%2C%20which%20stands%20for%20Base,new%20ways%20of%20doing%20business>, accessed March 14, 2024.