At its lowest strength since 1950, the Army warns that it may not be able to perform its missions for lack of troops and resources.

The Army Signals Danger

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THE US Army is probably in finer fighting trim than at any time since World War II. By and large, its soldiers are sharp. Its modern tanks, mechanized-infantry and armored-infantry fighting vehicles, attack and transport helicopters, and artillery pieces for rockets and shells endow the Army with unprecedented firepower and mobility.

All is far from rosy, however. The Army is losing the numbers game. It is spread thin and shrinking. Now smaller than it has ever been since 1950, at the onset of the Korean War, the Army will have its ranks thinned even more as a result of the latest round of defense budget cuts.

Thus the Army may soon be in over its head unless its missions are arbitrarily scaled down in accordance with its size—never mind the threat—or unless those missions become more manageable through a lessening of the threat.

Army leaders are leery of political proposals to withdraw US forces from Europe. They emphasize that those forces are in Europe as stewards of US interests as well as to help NATO allies defend their soil.

For all that, there is hope and cautious optimism in the upper reaches of the Army that NATO can strike a treaty with the Warsaw Pact to cut both sides' conventional forces in Europe and bring them into something approaching symmetry. There is also considerable interest in Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev's proposal to make unilateral cuts of Soviet forces on the continent.

More Than It Can Handle?

The way things now stand in Europe and elsewhere in the world, it is entirely possible that the Army already has more than it can handle. Army leaders freely confess their concerns. They claim that the Army is no longer large enough to do everything that it may be called on to do, given the worldwide scope and widening variety of its land-warfare responsibilities.

"The array of challenges for which the Army must prepare has never been more complex," asserts the posture statement for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991 that the service's leadership issued early this year.

Firepower firmly in hand, this combat-ready infantryman symbolizes the US Army's fighting trim. The Army has made great gains in modernization and readiness but is feeling the budgetary pinch in its dwindling force structure. Now at its smallest since the start of the Korean War, the Army may have too many missions in too many places for too few troops.

The danger that the US will wind up with a can't-do Army, intimidated by such challenges, is candidly acknowledged in the posture statement. The Army leadership flatly states that "our force structure may not be adequate to accomplish our missions," that "our ability to provide the necessary range of capable, ready, and supported forces is at risk," and that "this does not bode well for our strategy of deterrence."

The posture statement makes allowance for opposing views, if only to rebut them. It notes, for example, that the Army's misgivings about being able to maintain and fortify the nation's nonnuclear deterrent forces are considered irrelevant in some political and strategic circles because the US is expected to retain an adequate nuclear deterrent, come what may. "However, in an age of relative nuclear parity, the burden of deterrence has shifted significantly toward conventional land forces," the Army says. The service warns that the US must take care not to bring about "a weakened Army that will not be able to respond swiftly with forces of sufficient quality, quantity, and staying power to provide a credible deterrent to coercion or outright aggression."

The Army puts a premium in its posture statement on "staying power," which it describes as "a unique contribution of land forces" in waging war. It contends that "we must have the capability to conduct sustained operations or our adversaries will be able to win by simply outlasting us."

According to the posture statement, the Army will be weakened in a number of ways if its buying power continues to erode. For example, "readiness will be threatened" and "the pace of modernization will be further slowed."

But further cuts of force structure are clearly in the forefront of the Army's fears.

Force Cuts

Early this year, the Army was at pains to point out that the deceleration of US military spending had caused it to cut its total force by 8,600 active-duty soldiers and 12,000 civilians since 1986. It also was forced to abandon plans to strengthen Reserve Component and Army National Guard forces and get them in shape "to meet all of the wartime requirements" of the Commanders in Chief (CINCs) of US warfighting commands.

"In the face of [fiscal] pressures," the service said at the time, "the adequacy of the current and future Army force structure to execute national military strategy with a reasonable assurance of success is increasingly open to question."

Then matters rapidly got worse. The Bush Administration made additional cuts in its defense budgets for Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991, and the Army lost another $4 billion that it had banked on spending over those two years.

As a result, it will have to lop 7,900 additional soldiers from its active force. More than forty percent of them—3,312, to be exact—will be drawn from the 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson, Colo., in the form of an entire brigade—lock, stock, and barrel—and all division-level units supporting it.

The burden of deterrence has shifted significantly toward land forces, which are counted on to bring "staying power" to combat.

The remainder of the personnel cuts will come naturally from deactivating Pershing missile units that were positioned in Europe until the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty uprooted them. Those cuts may seem aseptic, but the Army doesn't see them that way. It would like to be able to keep the soldiers, if not their units.

By the end of September 1991, the active Army will be down to 764,100 soldiers. Given its heavy responsibilities in Europe and Korea and its potential need to fight in any number of places around the globe, the Army, at those numbers, is being forced to court disaster, its leaders contend.

The Army has tried to put the best face on the most recent defense budget cuts. Even though forces will be cut, their readiness and sustainability will be preserved, the service claimed. It also maintained that the damage to force structure had been "minimized," considering what might have been.

The service also claimed that it would be able to live with "slowing the pace of modernization, which includes the elimination of programs that contribute the least to warfighting."

State-of-the-Art, but Tight

As to modernization, there was some reason to cheer. The Army was permitted to proceed in developing its highly prized, state-of-the-art LHX light attack helicopter. It had been a close call, though. Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney had decided to scrap the program, but he acceded to the Army's eleventh-hour appeal in its behalf.

The service was forced to accept a hard bargain, however, and will have to take LHX out of its hide.

To come up with funding to continue the LHX program, the Army will eliminate one attack helicopter battalion from its active force and two such battalions from its reserve force by the end of Fiscal Year 1991.

That won't be the end of it. Over the following two years, the Army National Guard will be forced to relinquish two battalions of attack helicopters, and yet another battalion will be excised from Army Aviation's active force.

When all is said and done, the Army will reduce its fleet of helicopters by some 2,000 over the next several years. While bringing along the LHX, it will revamp its aviation plans and programs in a big way.

As things stood at budget-revision time, the Army will be forced to scrap its helicopter improvement program (AHIP) for upgrading older but still useful combat choppers. It will also have to cut the annual production runs of AH-64 Apache attack helicopters and UH-60A Black Hawk troop helicopters and buy out Apaches by the end of 1991, several years sooner than planned.

Army officials made it clear, however, that they intended to press for restoration of enough AHIP funding to keep the program alive. The Army had been counting on AHIP to enhance the nightfighting gear and capability of all its helicopters.

With AHIP aborted and with Apache production destined to end prematurely, "we will have a cold attack-helicopter production base for as much as four years" in the mid-1990s, lamented Under Secretary of the Army Michael E. Stone.

There was good news for the Army in the Air Force portion of the revised defense budget. Ample funding was provided to advance the McDonnell Douglas C-17 airlifter safely out of development and solidly into production. The budget also enables USAF to begin upgrading A-10s and F-16s for close air support of front-line soldiers under fire.

The Army has a long-standing need for a great deal more Air Force airlift. Stateside troops can't fight unless they can get to combat zones. As all too many war games have shown, the outcome of a war in Europe would hinge on how fast and how copiously those troops can arrive.

This is why the Army, along with the warfighting CINCs of unified commands, joined with the Air Force in vigorously promoting the C-17 program throughout the Pentagon budgeting process.

"The worldwide mobility of Army forces remains inadequate," declares a recent Army document. It continues: "The Army supports the Air Force C-17 program, which provides for critical intertheater and intratheater [airlift] capabilities essential to projecting Army forces in time of crisis."

The Army has come a long way amid many changes in this decade. Despite major problems with some systems—such as the ill-fated DIVAD air defense weapon—the modernization program that the service launched in the mid- to late 1970s, once rid of the tremendous expense of the Vietnam War, has paid off in a wealth of new weapons and computer and communications gear.

Flexible Components

All such improvements have enabled the Army to spruce up its line outfits, refashion many of them, and mix and match them in different ways in its attempts to stay abreast of national requirements.

The Army now has twenty-eight combat divisions and twenty-two combat brigades that belong to no particular division. Ten of the divisions are in the Army National Guard. Of the eighteen divisions in the active force, six include "round-out" brigades of Army reservists. Nearly two-thirds of all combat-support units that would be available in the event of wartime mobilization are made up of National Guard or Reserve Component troops.

The active-component force is the one that is spread thin and that may have too tall an order. It embodies "all units needed on a day-to-day basis around the world to deter aggression in concert with US allies" and to quell conflict and "defend US interests wherever they may be challenged," the Army says.

In all, the Army is made up of heavy forces, light forces, and special operations forces (SOF).

At the heart of heavy forces are six armored divisions of about 16,800 soldiers each and eight mechanized infantry divisions of about 17,100 each. These divisions, together with stand-alone armored and mechanized brigades, each about one-fourth the size of a whole division, are the Army's big hitters.

They are in business to wage what the Army calls "mid-intensity to high-intensity combat" against enemy forces that likewise are heavily armored and mechanized—namely, Warsaw Pact land forces, formidable of firepower and all too numerous, in the European theater.

Korea has also claimed the Army's close attention for nearly forty years. The 2d Infantry Division, long a fixture there, is technically neither an armored division nor a mechanized division. It nevertheless qualifies as more heavy than light in makeup because it contains two tank battalions, two mechanized battalions, three helicopter battalions, and five artillery battalions.

With its forward units dug in at the demilitarized zone (DMZ) between South and North Korea, the 2d Infantry has undergone quite a change in recent years.

In 1977, when President Carter suggested pulling the 2d out of Korea, it had far fewer tanks and armored-infantry vehicles than it has today. Even so, it was widely regarded as a crack, combat-ready outfit with an inarguably valid mission, and Mr. Carter was persuaded to leave it alone.

Also individualistic in composition are the 82d Airborne Division, the 101st Air Assault Division, and the 9th Motorized Division. The 9th is a cross between a heavy division and a light one. The other two are considered light divisions, even though the 101st is heavy in helicopters.

In the main, the Army's light force is built around five light infantry divisions, each consisting of some 10,800 soldiers. The light-division concept having been successfully tested at Fort Lewis, Wash., these divisions were formed throughout the 1980s to afford the Army greater flexibility.

Rapid Deployment

Sacrificing heavy firepower for the sake of greater air and land mobility, the light divisions are designed for rapid deployment to reinforce forward-deployed heavy units or to go it alone in arenas more conducive to their armor-lacking tactics.

Light infantry divisions would be "especially effective in urban areas and restrictive terrain," the Army claims.

Special Operations Forces are made up of about 5,000 active-duty soldiers and three times that many in reserve outfits. Reliant in most cases on Army helicopters and Air Force fixed-wing aircraft for sup-

Despite the onsurge of special-operations and light forces, armored and mechanized units are still the Army's power hitters.

porting firepower and mobility, the SOFs are subdivided into four Special Forces Groups, the 75th Ranger Regiment, Army Special Operations Aviation units, and Civil Affairs forces.

The SOFs are sitting pretty these days. As the posture statement explains it, "The Army's budget for SOF has continued to expand despite overall budget constraints for FYs '90 and '91. This funding increase reflects the challenges to our nation's security, and allows SOF structure expansion even in the face of active-force strength reductions."

On the other hand, the latter-day special emphasis on SOF is regarded as misplaced and is resented in some quarters across the services. Many Army traditionalists contend that the buildup of special forces—and of light infantry outfits too, for that matter—has been overdone at the expense of heavy forces that will always be, with their much more fearsome firepower, the real guts of the total fighting force.

A strong case can be made, however, that heavy forces, even if too few in number to suit the traditionalists in the "tank army," have never had it better. They fared exceptionally well in the process of modernizing the Army throughout this decade.

From the beginning of Fiscal Year 1980 to the end of Fiscal Year 1988, Army "heavy" units were the chief beneficiaries of new and better weapons all around. These included 6,473 General Dynamics (originally Chrysler) M1 Abrams main battle tanks, 4,883 FMC Corp. M2 and M3 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, 416 LTV Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), 603 McDonnell Douglas (originally Hughes) AH-64 Apache attack helicopters, 931 UTC-Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk troop-carrying helicopters, and a richly variegated assortment of nearly 75,000 wheeled vehicles.

In addition, 3,000 previous-generation General Motors M60 tanks and 342 Bell AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters were modernized.

Upgrading Artillery

Artillery, too, is being transformed. Central to its modernization through 1988 were twenty-one new MLRS batteries in the active force and five more in POMCUS (Prepositioning of Materiel Configured to Unit Sets) storage in Europe.

MLRS deployment, which is continuing, is crucial to the Army's ability to put its AirLand Battle doctrine into play. That doctrine is predicated on an Army-Air Force partnership in countering enemy attacks at the Forward Edge of the Battle Area and in striking, beyond the FEBA, enemy second-echelon and third-echelon units bent on reinforcing the front.

There is much more than MLRS to the remaking of the artillery. For example, three new battalions of 155-mm self-propelled howitzers and a target-acquisition battery have been brought into play, and the Army will soon begin deploying British-developed M119 105-mm light howitzers. They will be much lighter, shoot much farther, and be far easier to ferry via helicopters or land vehicles than the relatively unwieldy M102 howitzers they will supplant.

Many changes in the Army have been made in the name of staying power—making heavy forces, in particular, better able to sustain combat. A major change was the revamping of logistical support commands to expedite the repair and resupply of equipment during or directly after combat.

Each forward brigade was given a logistical support battalion. Such a battalion was also positioned in the rear area of each division.

Champions of the light-forces concept claimed vindication in the clearly satisfactory results of the US deployment of airborne and light-infantry troops to Honduras in March 1988. Nicaraguan infantry units, having crossed the border into Honduras, withdrew following the arrival of a US infantry brigade task force—two battalions of the 7th Infantry (Light) Division from California and two battalions of the 82d Airborne Division from North Carolina—3,200 soldiers in all.

At the time, Lt. Gen. John W. Foss, Commanding General of the US XVIII Airborne Corps, declared, "We have demonstrated our resolve to help our allies. Twelve days ago, there were Nicaraguan troops in Honduras with little likelihood of peace. [Now] there are no troops in Honduras, and [the Nicaraguans] have sat down at the peace table. . . ."

Last May, the Administration dispatched 2,000 US soldiers and Marines to Panama to defend fellow Americans and Panamanian allies in the bloody aftermath of that nation's election.

The situation in Central America will almost certainly continue to smolder. So far as the Army is concerned, given its decreasing size, there are altogether too many comparable places on the planet where it might have to fight to protect US interests.

As the Army posture statement ominously puts it: "Socioeconomic conditions in the Third World are worsening despite tentative advances toward democracy. At the same time, military capabilities are steadily rising, especially in the area of ground conventional forces. This grim combination of trends seems to portend increased violence and instability around the world." ■