

SUMMARY

As the U.S. Army's current Transformation Plan makes clear, important decisions about service recapitalization will have to be made in this decade. This is because the Army's equipment stock is aging. Most of the major combat vehicles and helicopters now in the inventory are purchases from the 1980s and early 1990s. Those recapitalization decisions that must soon be made will have a long-lasting effect on the Army, as the systems that will be placed in development and/or production during this decade will be in the future Army for decades to come.

We believe that one approach to long-range planning that can help the Army chart its modernization course involves the use of alternative futures. The alternative futures approach has the distinct advantage of allowing the Army to hedge against the uncertainty represented by the international security environment of the far-off future. Planners can look for common equipment needs found across a range of plausible futures. This methodology also enables the service to clearly see a range of possible modernization requirements.

This alternative futures exercise is set in the 2020–2025 timeframe. We have consciously avoided assessments of the probability of each future, instead positing simply that each future meets the “not implausible” standard. Various “signposts” have been prepared to help determine which futures are becoming more plausible as time moves forward. An illustrative combat scenario was created for each future as well. Neither the signposts nor the scenarios are presented here, but they can be found in a companion RAND report.¹

Six futures in total were developed to support this modernization study. The two best cases (from the perspective of U.S. national interests) are “U.S. Unipolarity” and “Democratic Peace.” Our two medium-good futures are labeled “Major Competitor Rising” and “Competitive Multipolarity,” and our one medium-bad world is called “Transnational

¹Brian Nichiporuk, *Alternative Futures and Army Force Planning: Implications for the Objective Force Era*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, MR-1676-A, 2003 (forthcoming).

Web.” Finally, the worst case is a future entitled “Chaos-Anarchy.” In each of the futures, a central mission for the Army was identified, a force size and structure was built, and necessary changes to the existing Army Transformation Plan suggested. The following paragraphs highlight these Army characteristics for each future.

The essential mission of the Army in a future characterized by U.S. Unipolarity would be to rapidly deploy for crisis-response missions in locations around the world. Opponents would be either regional powers of the same ilk as today’s rogue states or yet-smaller actors. The overall active Army was sized to have a personnel end strength approximately equal to today’s in the U.S. Unipolarity future. The Objective Force component of the force was modestly increased over current plans, while the Army XXI component was slightly reduced. Investment in deep strike and C4ISR saw small increases.

Democratic Peace is a very placid future and thus required an Army about one-third smaller than that of the 2000 era. Here, we made significant reductions in traditional Army XXI forces and truncated the Objective Force organizations currently being explored by the Army. On the other hand, the interim medium-weight units that are now being created would be well suited for this low-threat future.

Major Competitor Rising would require the Army to deter, and perhaps even defeat, a peer-level opponent. Major Competitor Rising would demand a 10 percent increase in Army end strength and major increases in the Objective Force, TMD, attack aviation, deep strike, and C4ISR. Medium-weight interim units would decrease from the total currently envisioned in the Army’s Transformation Plan.

The Competitive Multipolarity future would call for the largest of our six future armies—50 percent greater in terms of end strength than the 2000 Army. In this future the Army would have to be prepared for deployments to confront hostile actions by two different coalitions that are opposed to the United States. In view of the need for rapid deployment capability and the requirement to oppose capable heavy units in this future, we envisioned a significant increase over the number of currently planned Objective Force units as well as increases in TMD, aviation, deep strike, and C4ISR capabilities.

In the Transnational Web future, the threats to American interests are fundamentally different from those we see today. Major portions of the U.S. armed forces have been reoriented to respond to the new challenges posed by hostile transnational actors such as organized crime syndicates and activist networks within certain ethnic diasporas. The Army in this future would be 40 percent smaller than today's. Here we determined that there would be a reduced need for Objective Force and Army XXI forces. SOF capabilities, however, would require a very significant increase over today's levels.

Finally, Chaos-Anarchy represents a future replete with many failed states and increased warlordism in much of the developing world. This future would require an Army end strength 10 percent smaller than today's. In this case, we made substantial increases in SOF, counter-WMD, and CSS capabilities, while C4ISR would merit a modest increase. Both the Objective and Interim Forces are increased modestly in Chaos-Anarchy as well. TMD and deep strike investments could be reduced for this future, since U.S. interventions would mainly encounter low-tech military forces.

Looking across the six futures, we found we could make a handful of general insights about the demands upon Army modernization between now and 2025. It did appear that medium forces (both Objective and Interim) are appropriate in a majority of possible futures. On the other hand, continued investment in Army XXI capabilities seemed necessary in few cases. Increases in C4ISR capability would be useful across the board, although there are variations in the type of C4I system required from future to future. The size of Army SOF either remained the same or increased in all of our cases. Significant investments in Army aviation help in all futures, but the mix between attack and lift helicopters varies considerably. The appropriate mix of deep strike capabilities also changes significantly from future to future; in some futures, we observed a need to orient deep strike systems toward engagements inside urban areas, where the technical requirements are quite distinct from those for in-depth engagements against enemy ground combat forces on an open battlefield.