The Stryker Brigade Combat Team

Rethinking Strategic Responsiveness and Assessing Deployment Options

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Prepared for the
United States Air Force
Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited

RAND
Project AIR FORCE
BACKGROUND

Historically, to deter and defeat major threats in Europe and Asia, the United States has relied on forward-deployed Army and Air Force forces, Navy and Marine Corps forces afloat, long-range aircraft in the continental United States (CONUS), prepositioned unit sets in key regions, and reinforcing units from CONUS. For short-warning crises in other regions, Marine Expeditionary Units, the 82nd Airborne Division, Special Operations Forces, and Air Force/Navy air would be combined as appropriate to provide a limited capability that has usually been sufficient for noncombat evacuations and other lesser contingencies. The United States has not had the ability to deploy large joint forces globally from North America in a matter of days or weeks: The transportation challenge has been simply too great.

Army transformation efforts seek to establish that ability, turning the Army from the Legacy Force made up of well-equipped heavy warfighting forces, which are difficult to deploy strategically, and rapidly responding light forces, which lack staying power against heavy mechanized forces, to, first, an Interim Force of Stryker Brigade Combat Teams\(^1\)—brigade-sized forces equipped with a

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\(^1\)The Interim Brigade Combat Team was renamed the Stryker Brigade Combat Team in August 2002. The brigade is built around the Stryker, a new infantry carrier vehicle named in honor of two Medal of Honor recipients: Private First Class Stuart S. Stryker and Specialist Robert F. Stryker, who served in World War II and Vietnam, respectively.
family of current-generation medium-weight wheeled armored vehicles—then, 15 to 20 years out, the Objective Force, equipped with the Future Combat System (FCS), a medium-weight tank that the Army hopes can be as survivable and lethal as the 70-ton M-1 tank.

To better understand the requirement for strategic responsiveness, as well as what is achievable, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- Can the Air Force meet the Army’s 96-hour deployment goal?
- What combination of deployment and basing options would maximize the strategic responsiveness of new Army forces?
- How much unambiguous warning does the United States usually have before it initiates military operations?
- How much of this time will civilian decisionmakers typically consume in their deliberations before ordering deployment of military forces?
- Are large U.S. forces likely to deploy globally or just to certain regions?
- At what depths from the littoral might U.S. forces have to operate?

To assess deployment and basing options, the study team developed a simple spreadsheet that calculated transit times, loading and unloading times, and airfield throughput. It used military planning factors to determine aircraft maximum loads and ranges, and a variety of historical materials and interviews, as detailed in the Bibliography, to conduct the broader analysis of strategic responsiveness.

KEY FINDINGS

The main conclusion of this report is that a force with more than 1,000 vehicles cannot be deployed by air from CONUS to the far reaches of the globe in four days. However, with some mobility enhancements, it is possible to achieve deployment timelines on the order of one to two weeks, which is quite rapid for a motorized force.
Specifically, the combination of CONUS bases (particularly Fort Polk in Louisiana), an SBCT forward-based in Germany, and regional preposition sites in Guam and Diego Garcia offers the ability to deploy the SBCT by air or sea to key regions in 5 to 14 days. Figure S.1 illustrates specific times for scenarios in South America, East Asia, Africa, Europe, and Southwest Asia.

Findings for the other questions are as follows:

- Large U.S. joint operations have historically been concentrated in just a few regions: Europe, Latin America, the Persian Gulf, and Asia.

- The global war on terrorism is a wild card. It could lead to operations in locales more remote than the historical regions, but the forces involved for most such operations are likely to be special forces or other small, light forces, which are easy to deploy.

- Past security challenges (such as those that led to Operation Just Cause in Panama) have usually developed over a time frame of
months or years, allowing for prepositioning and other regional
defensive measures that reduce the need for rapid deployment
from CONUS.

- Prepositioning of equipment or overseas basing of forces is the
  single most effective way to increase the responsiveness of U.S.
  Army forces for operations in key regions. From these preposition
  sites, the choice of airlift or sealift depends on the scenario.

- In general, deep interior deployments favor airlift; littoral scenar-
  ios favor sealift. Particular cases may present neither an airfield
  nor a port in proximity to the area of operations, requiring long
  road marches either way. To determine the preferred deploy-
  ment mode, a detailed analysis of road networks and other local
  considerations would be necessary.

- For littoral deployments from preposition sites to ports in much
  of the Third World, fast, shallow-draft ships such as the catama-
  ran ferries currently being tested by the Department of Defense
  (DoD) appear to offer the fastest and most robust option, al-
  though their shorter range may require more preposition sites
  than do larger ships. The ability of shallow-draft ships to use
  smaller ports avoids the time delays, complications, and weather
  constraints associated with lighterage.2

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USAF

Army efforts to develop medium-weight forces3 offer Joint Task
Force or theater commanders capabilities not resident in current
light or heavy forces and should be supported by the U.S. Air Force.
Although the more-ambitious air deployment objectives of 96 hours
for SBCTs and Objective Force brigades may not be feasible, air
transport remains the fastest option for some contingencies. Fast
sealift is promising for littoral operations. Even then, airlift is likely
to be called upon to move critical personnel and equipment. For ex-

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2 Lighterage refers to the anchoring and unloading of large ships offshore, using land-
ing craft (lighters) to carry the loads into the port.

3 Medium-weight forces seek to combine the mobility and firepower of heavy forces
with the deployability of light forces. The Stryker brigade truly is medium weight. It is
half the weight of a heavy brigade and twice the weight of a light brigade.
ample, air might move Army port operations and security personnel and equipment to prepare a port for the arrival of the SBCT. Special forces might move by air to conduct supporting reconnaissance, direct action, or other special missions. In forced-entry scenarios, airborne forces might seize a port for the SBCT. Finally, airlift is likely to play a critical role in high-priority resupply and support operations.

More broadly, we note that the Air Force has a stake in Army transformation efforts. The Army envisions future forces operating in ways that are likely to require closer air-ground cooperation on intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); lift; and precision fires. We recommend that Air Force and Army leaders initiate a dialogue on these issues of mutual concern. The Army would greatly benefit from the USAF’s expertise on air deployment, ISR, survivability of transport aircraft, and air-to-ground fires. The USAF is beginning to develop new concepts for air-to-ground operations and would benefit greatly from Army expertise on land operations and from the substantial effort the Army has already invested in developing new concepts for the future battlefield.