How Can the Army Improve Rapid-Reaction Capability?

IN CHAPTER TWO WE SHOWED THAT CURRENT LIGHT FORCES have inadequate firepower, mobility, and protection for many missions, particularly for missions that pit such forces against larger and heavier enemy forces. Given that finding, the subsequent three chapters addressed three different paths for remedying that shortfall. Each of those sections presented the paths and their analytic underpinnings, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses in isolation. In this chapter we step back and take a broader perspective, first comparing across the three paths and then presenting a strategy for improving rapid-reaction capability.

Comparing Across the Three Paths: Force Applicability and Implementability

One way to evaluate the three paths is to assess them in terms of a framework that measures the light forces they create against a number of critical mission parameters. On the surface, given all the changes occurring in the geopolitical arena, basic planning suggests that the Army should reshape light forces along the following parameters:

- The kind of missions it will need to address (e.g., peace operations, forced entry, area defense, local attack).
- The environment that it will need to operate in (e.g., open, closed, urban, contaminated).
- The level of threat it will need to defeat (e.g., size, level of sophistication).
- The kind or nature of threat it will have to address (e.g., militia, light infantry, mechanized, combined arms).
- The responsiveness with which it will need to deploy (e.g., few days, week, few weeks).

Although each parameter represents a significant challenge by itself, the parameters are often interwoven. In some sense, while the overall magnitude of the threat may have been decreasing, the number and complexity of threats has been on the rise. This uncertainty has compounded the rapid-reaction challenge.

Table 6.1 summarizes our assessment of the three paths in terms of whether the light forces created have more, less, or about the same capability

Table 6.1—Relative Impact of Paths for Improving Capability of Light Forces (Over Current Light Forces)

Critical Rapid-Reaction Parameters	Path 1: Enhance Current Light Forces	Path 2: Make Light Forces Smaller and More Dispersed	Path 3: Introduce Maneuver to Light Forces
Kind of Mission	No change	Decrease	Significant increase
Type of Environment	No change	No change	Increase or decrease
Level of Threat	Increase	No change	Significant increase
Kind of Threat	Increase	Decrease	Significant increase
Responsiveness into Theater	No change	Significant increase	Decrease

as the current light force. On the whole, while all three paths offer significant benefits over a current light force, they also come with some drawbacks in relation to these five parameters.

Kind of mission. By adding maneuver, path 3 addresses head-on the fundamental issue of the "globalization" of threats. Although path 2 is revolutionary in form, it would result in a decrease in mission robustness over current light airborne forces. In particular, it might require sacrificing mission objectives to minimize casualties, and the path 2 force might have difficulty holding terrain—an element that may be of greater, not less, importance in the future.

Type of environment. All three paths offered only marginal improvements in the emerging environments that U.S. forces will face—complex terrain, low-intensity conflict, etc. The only exception was path 3, which could improve force applicability in military operations on urban terrain (MOUT) or in a contaminated environment, owing to the added protection of advanced, highly mobile vehicles. However, the same vehicles could well be ineffective in constrictive terrain, such as jungle environments, where dismounted infantry aided by dispersed sensors and relatively short-range, personal weapons might be the primary option.

Level and kind of threat. Both path 1 and path 3 provided improvements to current light forces in this area, the latter considerably more than the former. To some extent, path 2 might actually reduce the level of threat that could be addressed, since "reachback" weapons involved in the concept leverage precision-guided weapons and, thus, tend to be less appropriate for handling threats other than massed armor, such as infantry-based threats or enemy forces that can operate with short exposure to top attack weapons.

Responsiveness into theater. Here, path 2 offered substantial improvement over current light airborne forces because of the proposed force's smaller overall size and weight. Path 1 mimics current airborne responsiveness, while path 3 would most likely result in a force that has greater airlift burden and, thus, longer timelines into theater. Then again, once in theater, the path 3 force would minimize one of the major shortfalls of today's light units—a lack of tactical mobility and protection. Current light forces cannot fully exploit successes of indirect-fire systems by applying maneuver to decisively defeat an enemy. The advanced maneuvering force would take maximum advantage of innovations as they emerge—directed-energy weapons, ubiquitous sensing, hybrid (powered and/or buoyant) airlifters, robotic vehicles, stealth treatments, etc. It could also streamline the vertical organization of today's forces, from one where information and commands tend to move up and down many echelons to one that is more horizontal, resulting in faster response and greater efficiency in calls for fire.

Beyond these force effectiveness implications, the three paths also have different implementation implications, including the *cost* of creating and maintaining the unit, the *schedule* or time required to develop and train the force, and the *risk* associated with acquiring the new capabilities. Ultimately, such fiscal constraints will help to determine which, if any, paths are taken.

Not surprisingly, path 1 seems the easiest path to implement. As an enhancement of current light airborne forces with a new concept and associated technologies, it has the fewest structural implications. However, while structure would change very little, resources would have to be reallocated to buy the new weapons and RSTA systems the path requires.

Path 2 would require modest changes that would involve reorganizing at least a portion of today's light units. Regular training on the more dispersed tactics and reliance on indirect-fire reachback systems would be key. The Army could either reorganize one or more of its light divisions (including the 82nd Airborne) to achieve the capabilities called for or create new light units of battalion or greater size located at corps level. The latter possibility would require a "bill payer" in terms of manpower and structure. Also, the Army may have to eliminate or truncate other modernization programs to free resources to acquire the systems required for this form of operations. Finally, the type of light force called for would probably have to rely heavily on both overhead sensing and Navy and Air Force reachback fires. Thus, the modernization programs of those services would be particularly important.

Path 3 would be the most capital-intensive course of action because it requires developing and fielding new light- or medium-weight combat vehicles, along with changes to organization, tactics, training, and support. The overall cost would depend highly on the number of units created. For example, if the

Army chose to convert two armored cavalry regiments, the resource implications would be considerably less than to convert the 82nd Airborne, 10th Mountain, and 25th Light Infantry.

Developing a Strategy to Improve Rapid-Reaction Capability

Each of the three paths explored offers both relative strengths and relative weaknesses over a current-day light airborne force, as well as different implementation challenges. In many ways, these dissimilar concepts have characteristics that complement each other. A capability designed for meeting the wide range of tomorrow's rapid-reaction challenge might take on a form that embodies all three paths, provided affordability issues can be resolved. For the foreseeable future, the Army cannot count on any significant increase in either its budget or force structure. Thus, any combination of paths would likely require the Army to reprioritize its resources. In particular, programs that aim to strengthen the "counteroffensive" capability of today's heavy-mechanized forces might have to be weighed with respect to bringing such new capabilities on line. In addition, programs of other services, such as fighter improvements, carrier developments, and ballistic missile defense, may all be less necessary with a more capable rapid-reaction force.

If all three paths were pursued, the notional rapid-reaction capability would consist of three components: (1) a stealthy, small, and very-fast-deploying force that would rely on nonorganic fire support, (2) an enhanced airborne force similar to the 82nd DRB that would be equipped with substantial organic precision fires, and (3) a mounted force equipped with highly agile maneuvering vehicles that can provide both indirect- and direct-fire capability. By our assessment, the technology either already exists or can be developed to create all three components. In fact, although the end capabilities of the components differ, the underlying tactics and technologies would have considerable overlap, possibly yielding an economies of scale effect.

Regardless of what strategy is developed, the capability chosen will need to accommodate future trends. For example, global urbanization trends ensure that MOUT will be an increasingly likely prospect for ground forces. Unless proper decisions are made in terms of equipment, training, and organization, U.S. rapid-reaction forces could see many of their advantages in technology and technique diminished in a MOUT environment. New operational concepts, such as focusing on standoff fires, sealing off areas, and using unmanned systems to help deal with the unique conditions of urban operations, will need to be considered. In addition, the potential difficulties of operations in heavily forested or jungle areas should be considered in developing any new capability.

Many of the sensors and weapons in which U.S. forces are placing great stock can be either severely degraded or even negated in heavily foliated areas. It is not obvious that technology will be able to quickly overcome this problem, and the enemy will likely capitalize on this weakness. Finally, as changes and enhancements are made to the light forces in coming years, the reality that smaller contingencies and missions involving noncombatants will populate the overall mission spectrum should be appropriately addressed in current planning.

Although the research presented here has addressed a wide range of issues, particularly with force effectiveness, many questions should still be answered as the Army moves toward change. Is technology the primary answer, or will it be the human component (organization, selection, training, and motivation) that makes the difference? Will specialized, uniquely trained units for each type of mission (MOUT, low-intensity conflict, high-intensity warfare) ultimately be needed, or can one or a few types of forces be tailored as necessary? How can multiservice, joint, and coalition operations be linked with new Army concepts, and how can this be facilitated? How will the enemy operate to defeat new innovations, and how can these countermeasures be countered? What is the cost of change, and what is the metric that reflects reduced casualties, better responsiveness, and improved deterrence?

Clearly, many questions must be resolved as the Army transitions to a more responsive force with greater rapid-reaction capability. Some of these questions can benefit from additional study and analysis. Others may require experimentation. Still others may require field-testing, training, and implementation to be fully understood. With regard to becoming more relevant in the new millennium with greater rapid-reaction capability, the Army *is* at a crossroads: the time to select a direction is now.