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# How Big Should the Army Be? Considerations for Congress

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## Summary

Article I, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution vests Congress with broad powers over the armed forces, including the power "To raise and support Armies" and "To provide and maintain a Navy." As such, the size of the armed forces is a topic of perennial congressional interest and debate. Congress annually sets minimum and maximum strength levels for the active components and maximum strength levels for the reserve components.

The House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2017 authorized differing levels for active duty personnel in each of the services, but these authorizations diverge most significantly with respect to the Army. The Senate version of the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act approved Army end strength of 460,000 soldiers, while the House version approved an Army end strength of 480,000. The Senate figure represents a decrease of 15,000 soldiers in comparison to the Army's FY2016 end strength of 475,000, while the House figure represents an increase of 5,000.

Congress's decision about the size of the Army for FY2017 will likely hinge on how it reconciles competing interpretations and judgments about key issues, including:

- The current and emerging strategic environment;
- The role of the Army in advancing national security interests within that environment;
- How any additional end strength would be used by the Army;
- The results of a congressionally directed study on the future of the Army; and
- The trade-offs associated with various options to fund additional strength in the context of budgetary constraints.

In addition to the decision for FY2017, the debate about the size of the Army may well continue into the next Congress, as the Department of Defense plans further reductions in the size of the Army, proposing FY2018 end strength of 450,000. There will be also be a new President in January, and his or her policy priorities may revise the contours of this debate.

This report provides an overview of active duty Army personnel strength changes in recent years, outlines the different end strength authorizations in the House and Senate versions of the FY2017 NDAA, highlights the perspectives which have contributed to these diverging approaches in the respective NDAA's, and outlines some factors which Congress may consider as it determines the appropriate size for the Army.

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## Background

The size of the armed forces is a topic of perennial congressional interest and debate, as each year Congress sets:

- minimum and maximum strength levels for the active components (AC); and
- maximum strength levels for the reserve components (RC).

The number of military personnel in each Service is directly related to how many units of various types they can deploy for use in operational missions. The number of military personnel also affects the cost of the military. More personnel require additional funding for their pay and benefits; combined into units, they require additional funding for training, operations, equipment, maintenance, and travel. The number of military personnel also have a long-term impact on the cost of veterans benefits.

The House and Senate versions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2017 authorized differing levels for active duty personnel in each of the services, but these authorizations diverge most significantly with respect to the Army.<sup>1</sup> This report provides an overview of active duty Army personnel strength changes in recent years, highlights the factors which have contributed to these diverging approaches in the respective NDAA's, and outlines some factors which Congress may consider.

## Army Strength Overview

Congress regulates the size of the armed forces by authorizing specific personnel strength levels in law each year. Active component “end strength” for the Army has changed substantially over the past several decades, as shown in **Figure 1**. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Army personnel strength declined rapidly in the 1990s, levelling off at about 480,000 soldiers. Congress increased the Army’s strength in response to the demands of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but began reversing those increases in light of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq in 2011, the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan beginning in 2012, and budgetary constraints.

### What is End Strength?

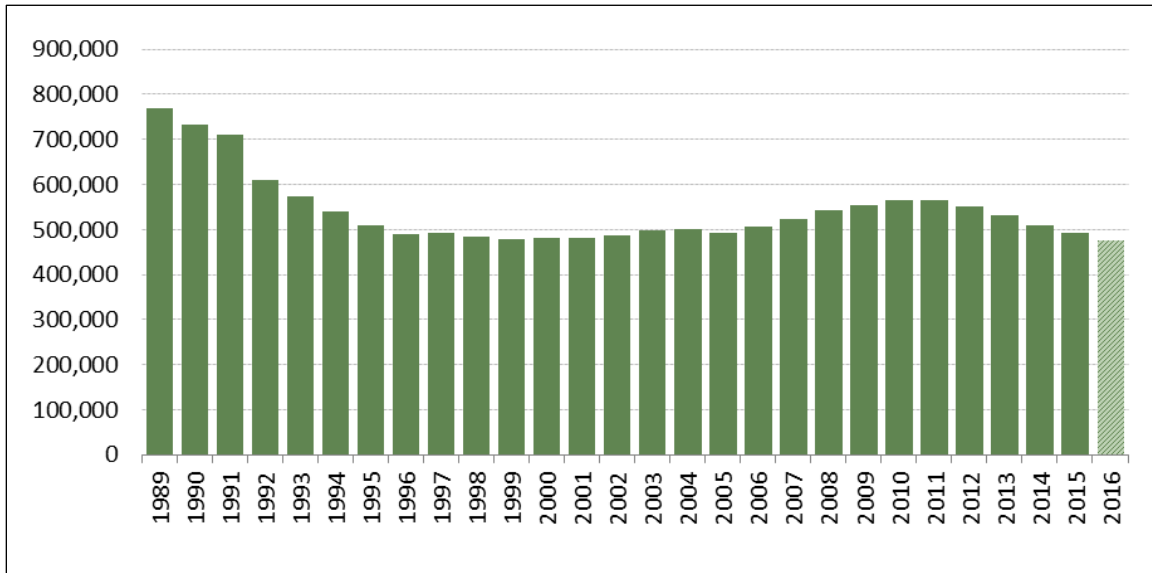
A commonly-used term when debating personnel strength levels is “end strength.” The term “end strength” refers to the authorized strength of a specified branch of the military at the end of a given fiscal year (i.e., on September 30). Authorized strength means “the largest number of members authorized to be in an armed force, a component, a branch, a grade, or any other category of the armed forces.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, “end strengths” are the maximum number of military personnel permitted in a given branch of the armed forces on September 30 of a given year.<sup>3</sup> Congress also sets minimum strength levels for the active component, which may be identical to or lower than the end strength.

<sup>1</sup> The respective bills also differed on the end strength for the Army Reserve and Army National Guard.

<sup>2</sup> 10 U.S.C. 101(b)(11).

<sup>3</sup> However, the law also permits the service secretaries to exceed this maximum amount by up to 2%, and the Secretary of Defense to increase this maximum amount by up to 3%. 10 U.S.C. 115.

**Figure I. Army End Strength, FY1989-2016**



**Source:** Defense Manpower Data Center (1989-2015) and FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act (2016)  
**Notes:** 1989-2015 is actual strength at end of fiscal year; 2016 is authorized strength at end of fiscal year

### Proposed End Strengths for FY2017

The end strength for the Army in FY2016, as established by Section 401 of the FY2016 National Defense Authorization Act, is 475,000 soldiers. For FY2017, the Administration proposed lowering the Army’s end strength to 460,000. The Senate version of the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act approved Army end strength identical to the Administration request, while the House version approved Army end strength of 480,000.

**Table I. FY2017 Proposed Active Duty Army End Strength**  
 Comparison of FY2016 Enacted with Administration Request, H.R. 4909 and S. 2943

FY2016		FY2017					
Authorized	Admin Request	House Approved Level (H.R. 4909)	Change from FY2016 Authorized	Change from FY2017 Request	Senate Approved Level (S. 2943)	Change from FY2016 Authorized	Change from FY2017 Request
<b>475,000</b>	460,000	<b>480,000</b>	+5,000	+20,000	<b>460,000</b>	-15,000	0

The divergence between the Administration request and the House and Senate bills reflects differing assessments of a variety of factors, including operational tempo, budgetary constraints and, most frequently, readiness (see text box below for a summary of these competing perspectives). Readiness is a term policy makers, analysts, and military leaders often use when describing the state of the U.S. military. The Department of Defense defines readiness as “the ability of military forces to fight and meet the demands of assigned missions.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, as amended through February 15, 2016, p. 198, available at [http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf).

Army readiness evaluations revolve around four main components: personnel, equipment availability, equipment readiness, and training. The unit's overall readiness assessment—its ability to accomplish its core functions, provide its intended capabilities, and carry out its mission essential tasks—is determined by the lowest rating of these four areas. As the lowest rating factor determines the overall readiness evaluation, an improvement in one area will not necessarily improve the overall readiness rating of a unit. Additionally, as the individual factors can influence each other (for example, increasing personnel in a unit without providing them sufficient training could improve the personnel rating but lower the training rating), one cannot necessarily make future readiness predictions based on projected improvement in one area. For a more detailed discussion of how the Army determines and reports unit readiness, see CRS Report R43808, *Army Active Component (AC)/Reserve Component (RC) Force Mix: Considerations and Options for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert and Lawrence Kapp.

## Considerations for Congress

As Congress continues to debate the appropriate size for the Army several considerations are particularly significant. These include the strategic environment, the role of the Army within this environment, how the Army might use additional end strength, the results of a congressionally directed study on the future of the Army, and the constraints of Budget Control Act of 2011. Each of these topics is discussed in more detail below.

### The Current and Emerging Strategic Environment

For many observers, questions regarding the appropriate end strength of the Army are related to the changing international security landscape, and the perception that those changes are resulting in heightened threats to the United States and its interests abroad. For others, the cost of increasing the size of the Army is the predominant factor in the debate. The National Military Strategy (NMS), published in June 2015, describes a global environment marked by increasing interdependence, complexity, and the diffusion of information and technologies across state boundaries.<sup>5</sup> The NMS organizes threats to the U.S. into two primary categories: “revisionist” states and “violent extremist organizations” (VEO). With respect to “revisionist states,” the NMS calls attention to the challenges posed by four different nations: Russia, Iran, North Korea and China. Russia, it states, has demonstrated its willingness to redraw international boundaries and violate international law using military force. Further, the NMS states that Iran is a state-sponsor of terrorism that has undermined stability in Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen. North Korea, according to the NMS, threatens its regional neighbors (including Japan and South Korea) with its production of nuclear weapons. Finally, the NMS argues that China's recent “land reclamation” (also referred to as “island building”) activities in the South China Sea are destabilizing. With respect to VEOs, the NMS points out that these actors use a combination of low-technology weaponry (such as suicide vests and improvised explosive devices) as well as sophisticated propaganda and messaging strategies to spread their influence.

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<sup>5</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “National Military Strategy 2015: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security,” June 2015 [http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015\\_National\\_Military\\_Strategy.pdf](http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf).

### **2016 Perspectives on Army Strength Levels**

#### **Quote from House Armed Services Committee Report to Accompany H.R. 4909:**

“To lessen the stress and strain on the force and their families, the bill also halts and begins to reverse the drawdown of military end strength, by preserving the active duty Army at 480,000, and adding 3,000 Marines, 1,715 sailors, and 4,000 airmen in fiscal year 2017.”

“The committee recognizes that while the Department’s missions and requirements have increased, its resources have decreased and readiness has suffered. The Chief of Staff of the Army testified, “Right now the readiness of the United States Army... is not at a level that is appropriate for what the American people would expect to defend them.” The Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps testified, “Our deployment-to-dwell-time ratio continues to exceed the rate that we consider sustainable... The strains on our personnel and our equipment are showing in many areas.” And, the Air Force Secretary testified, “Less than half of our combat forces are ready for... a high-end fight.” These readiness shortfalls in the services ultimately lead to a joint force that is, as stated in testimony by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, “stressed to execute a major contingency operation” and on a path towards being “unable to execute the current defense strategy.”

The committee believes that it is fundamentally wrong to send service members out on missions for which they are not fully prepared or fully supported. The committee shares the responsibility of reducing the risk for the Nation’s warfighters by ensuring that they are well-trained and supported, and that the equipment they use is properly maintained and combat-ready. Therefore, H.R. 4909 would prioritize resources to address readiness shortfalls across the services and, as discussed elsewhere in this report, reverse end strength cuts to the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force.”

#### **Quote from Senate Armed Services Committee Report to Accompany S.2943:**

“The Committee remains concerned about the appropriate size of the Army, to include both the Active and Reserve Component, and its readiness posture. As a result of the Budget Control Act, the Army has drawn down its end strength with a goal of 450,000 soldiers by the end of Fiscal Year 2018. General Mark Milley, the Chief of Staff of the Army, stated at the Army Posture hearing that the budget caps have resulted in a significant reduction in funding for modernization and research and development. He also emphasized that readiness is the top priority for the Army. In light of the threats confronting our nation, to include Russia, China, North Korea, Iran, and ISIS, the Army has accepted high military risk to meet the requirements of the National Security Strategy and the Defense Planning Guidance. But as General Milley also stated before this committee, we will “make the most efficient and effective use of the Army that we have.”

The Committee supports the Army’s efforts to increase readiness levels throughout the force, and recognizes the need to reassess the Army’s size in conjunction with available funding sources and the threats facing our country. “ (114-255, p.290-291)

#### **Quote from Statement of Administration Policy Regarding H.R. 4909**

“The Administration strongly objects to sections 401 and 411 [of H.R. 4909], which would establish end strength levels above the President’s Budget request for Active and Reserve Forces as of September 30, 2017. These provisions would force the Department to take additional risk in training and readiness of the current force, as well as investment in and procurement of future capabilities. In addition, the Administration objects to section 402, which would establish a new minimum active-duty end strength for the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force as of September 30, 2017. Adding unnecessary end strength in the manner proposed in the bill would invite a significant, unacceptable risk of creating a future hollow force, in which force structure exists, but the resources to make it ready do not follow. The Administration urges support of the Department’s plan, which reflects sound strategy and responsible choices among capacity, capabilities, and current and future readiness.”

While the NMS assesses the VEO threat as “immediate” due to the fact that they are currently destabilizing the Middle East, it also notes—for the first time in several decades—that the probability that the U.S. may find itself at war with another great power “low but growing.” The NMS also discusses “hybrid” warfare, whereby state and non-state actors (Russia and its Ukrainian proxies, for example) “blend techniques, capabilities, and resources to achieve their objectives.” The ensuing ambiguity in the battle space makes it difficult for the U.S. and its allies to plan for, and coordinate, their responses. Indeed, as Director for National Intelligence James



Clapper testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee, “[i]n my 50-plus years in the intelligence business, I don’t—I cannot recall a more diverse array of challenges and crises that we confront as we do today.”<sup>6</sup>

## Roles for the U.S. Army?

Although there is a general consensus that the global security environment is becoming significantly more challenging, the role that the U.S. military generally—and the Army specifically—ought to play in advancing U.S. interests is the subject of considerable debate. On the one hand, there are those who maintain that in the face of these myriad threats, the utility of ground forces will increase in the coming years. This is for a variety of reasons including (but not limited to): bolstering deterrent postures, prosecuting ‘grey zone’ or ‘hybrid’ warfare, providing enabling and logistical functions for the rest of the joint force, and prosecuting military campaigns in which terrain must be seized.

First, more so than remote or offshore military capabilities, the presence of ground forces can send unique political-military signals that can help deter adversaries and reassure allies. This is because the placement of ground forces abroad—which is, in essence, risking soldiers’ lives - communicates a high degree of U.S. commitment to the pursuit of national strategic objectives. The Cold War provides a historical example of these dynamics playing out. As the logic went, if the Soviets initiated a conflict, the large numbers of American troops stationed across Europe meant that U.S. casualties would be inevitable. The loss of American life in Europe would, in turn, prompt a significant U.S. military response to repel a Soviet attack. This is why the presence of U.S. troops in Europe during the Cold War was viewed as critical to underscoring the overall deterrent posture in that theater—in addition to the other military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, the presence of U.S. troops signaled the credibility of U.S. security guarantees in theater.<sup>7</sup>

Second, as was demonstrated in Iraq (2003-2010), Afghanistan (2001-present) and the Balkans (1990-present) operations that take place among local populations, to include peacekeeping, stability operations, counterinsurgencies, and ‘hybrid’ or ‘grey zone’ conflicts, generally require a significant presence on the ground. This is because such operations often use personnel-intensive techniques such as patrolling, intelligence collection, and targeted strikes in order to create stability that can subsequently be translated into sustainable political outcomes. As one argument goes, higher troop numbers are required for contingencies in which U.S. forces must operate among indigenous communities.<sup>8</sup> The Army’s 2006 field manual on counterinsurgency notes that for past conflicts, troop numbers were based on the number of *insurgents*, suggesting that 10 to 15 troops per insurgent were needed to ensure success; but a better means to determine troop requirements based on *inhabitants* now suggests 20 troops per 1,000 residents is the minimum density needed for effective counterinsurgency operations.<sup>9</sup>

This leads to the third role for large portions of U.S. ground forces—providing enabling and logistical support for both combat and steady-state operations. These combat-support and/or

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cq.com/doc/congressionaltranscripts-4831780?0>.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen J. McNinn, “Extended Deterrence: The U.S. Credibility Gap in the Middle East,” *The Washington Quarterly* 28 no. 3, Summer 2005, pp. 169-186.

<sup>8</sup> Steven M. Goode, “A Historical Basis for Force Requirements in Counterinsurgency,” *Parameters* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2009-2010) <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/articles/09winter/goode.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Headquarters, Department of the Army, FM 3-24, Counterinsurgency, December 2006, p. 1-13.



combat service support functions include life support, headquarters staffing and logistics.<sup>10</sup> Even “light footprint” counter-terrorism operations require supporting infrastructure, much of which is personnel-intensive. As General McChrystal (ret), former U.S. commander in Afghanistan remarked in an interview with the New York Times:

Q: Can one maintain a counterterrorism capability in Afghanistan without a complementary counterinsurgency effort?

A. If you take the raid into Abbotabad, that was years of gathering intelligence, some on the ground, some in the air, some signals intelligence. It was launched from bases — not just a single base, it needed a network. It had medevac [medical evacuation] available. It had this infrastructure that supported it that isn’t seen by people who just look at a couple helicopters landing in a compound. CT [counterterrorism] typically requires that. ... Otherwise, it’s really, really hard.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the Army provides a number of enablers to the joint force that allow the U.S. military—and, at times, other agencies of the government—to conduct global operations. According to a study released by the Army War College, the Army currently has executive agency for 41 out of 84 enabling and logistical tasks that support two or more services.<sup>12</sup> While some observers argue that the proportion of forces dedicated to logistical and enabling functions is out of balance with those actually performing operations (the so-called “tooth to tail ratio”),<sup>13</sup> others counter that the logistical requirements for expeditionary forces are now highly complex, and that without medevac, intelligence, financial (such as the Commander’s Emergency Response Program), and other enablers, deploying combat troops would be considerably more risky.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, ground forces are essential in those military operations wherein terrain must be seized and held. In recent campaigns, the U.S. generally has preferred to build the capacity of local forces in order to “hold” territory once it has been cleared. While this, in theory, requires fewer ground forces than one primarily conducted by U.S. forces, depending on the size of the training mission, this still can amount to a sizeable troop requirement. Currently, the United States has 3,870 troops in Iraq, the overwhelming bulk of which are focused on garrison-based, higher-level headquarters training of Iraqi Security Forces.<sup>15</sup> Operation Resolute Support, the NATO mission in Afghanistan, currently comprises 12,930 troops which are entirely focused on training and equipping the Afghan Security Forces.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, given the NMS statement that there is a small but growing likelihood that the U.S. might find itself in a conflict with a major power, the U.S. must also plan and prepare for those contingencies in which U.S. forces must shoulder the

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<sup>10</sup> John J. McGrath, p. 67-71.

<sup>11</sup> Michael R. Gordon, “Q. and A. With Former U.S. Commander in Afghanistan,” *The New York Times Online*, January 8, 2013, [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/world/asia/q-and-a-with-gen-stanley-mcchrystal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/09/world/asia/q-and-a-with-gen-stanley-mcchrystal.html?_r=0).

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Army War College Carlisle Scholars Program, *Elihu Root Study: The Total Army* (Carlisle: Army War College, 2016) p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Senator John McCain, “It’s Time to Upgrade the Defense Department,” *War on the Rocks Online*, November 10, 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/11/its-time-to-upgrade-the-defense-department/>.

<sup>14</sup> David Vergun, “Tail as Important as Tooth in Combat, Says Top Logistician,” *Army News Service Online*, May 21, 2014, [https://www.army.mil/article/126469/Tail\\_as\\_important\\_as\\_tooth\\_in\\_combat\\_says\\_top\\_\\_\\_/](https://www.army.mil/article/126469/Tail_as_important_as_tooth_in_combat_says_top___/).

<sup>15</sup> Congressional Research Service estimate based on open source reporting.

<sup>16</sup> Resolute Support Mission, “Resolute Support Mission: Key Facts and Figures,” *North Atlantic Treaty Organization Website*, May 2016, [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2016\\_05/20160518\\_2016-05-RSM-placemat.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2016_05/20160518_2016-05-RSM-placemat.pdf). Thirty-nine nations (both NATO and non-NATO) currently contribute troops to Resolute Support. As of June 2016, 7,008 U.S. troops are assigned to Resolute Support; the remainder of U.S. forces are assigned to Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, which focuses on counter-terrorism operations.

majority of the combat burden in confronting major adversaries.<sup>17</sup> This would likely require even more troops than those contingencies wherein the United States can operate “by, with and through,” local forces, especially given recent advances in the lethality of the military forces of other major powers like Russia.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, the above arguments notwithstanding, other observers maintain that most of the functions listed above can be adequately performed with lower troop levels due to emerging technologies, tactical innovations, and military capability advancements.<sup>19</sup> Proponents of this concept, which is often referred to as “transformation,” or a “revolution in military affairs,” maintain that special operations forces, combined with precision guided munitions, can have the kinds of decisive effects on the battlefield that used to be achieved through massive ground troop formations.<sup>20</sup> Others believe that the Army is “overreacting” in its arguments for increased troop strength to meet the emerging strategic environment. Contrary to arguments that the Army would be overmatched in a contest with Russian forces, some maintain that “it is exceedingly unlikely the U.S. Army will ever be ‘outranged and outgunned’” due to advances in joint warfare, and in particular, Air Force and Naval Air support to ground operations.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, some question whether the United States has the political appetite to engage in these kinds of ground-force intensive contingencies in the future. As evidence, they refer to the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance which states that, “U.S. forces will no longer be sized to conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, as former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, “in my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should ‘have his head examined,’ as General MacArthur so delicately put it.”<sup>23</sup> Still, he went on to note,

...when it comes to predicting the nature and location of our next military engagements, since Vietnam, our record has been perfect. We have never once gotten it right, from the Mayaguez to Grenada, Panama, Somalia, the Balkans, Haiti, Kuwait, Iraq, and more—we had no idea a year before any of these missions that we would be so engaged.<sup>24</sup>

## Use of Additional Personnel

Another factor that Congress may consider when debating the appropriate Army strength level is how any additional personnel would be used by the Army. An increase in end strength would allow the Army to create new units or bolster the capacity of existing units. Nevertheless, Army leadership has not publicly provided specifics on how additional end strength would be used.

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<sup>17</sup> Bryan Bender, “The Secret U.S. Army Study that Targets Moscow,” *Politico Online*, April 14, 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/04/moscow-pentagon-us-secret-study-213811>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, “Transforming the Military,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 3 (2002) p. 20-32.

<sup>20</sup> Paul K. Davis, “Military Transformation? Which Transformation, and What Lies Ahead?” as found in Stephen C. Cimbala (ed), *The George W. Bush Defense Program: Policy, Strategy & War*, (Potomac Books, 2010) p. 11-41.

<sup>21</sup> David Deptula and Doug Birkey, “Army Never Outgunned if Joint Force Can Help,” *Breaking Defense Online*, April 8, 2016, <http://breakingdefense.com/2016/04/army-never-outgunned-if-joint-force-can-help/?print=1>.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, January 2012, [http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense\\_Strategic\\_Guidance.pdf](http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Robert M. Gates, “Speech at the United States Military Academy,” *Department of Defense Online*, February 25, 2011, <http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1539>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

While the Army has not offered much detail on how additional end strength might be used, it is reasonable to speculate it would not solely be used to create new units but also to add capacity to existing units and supporting organizations as well. In terms of new units, the National Commission on the Future of the Army—discussed later in this report—pointed out shortfalls in air defense; tactical mobility; missile defense; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense; field artillery; fuel distribution; water purification; Army watercraft; and military police. Additional end strength could result in the creation of additional units of these types. Other Army initiatives could also benefit from increased end strength. In June 2016, Army Chief of Staff General Mark Milley stated that the Army plans to stand up a number of Train, Advise, and Assist Brigades over the next four to five years.<sup>25</sup> These brigades, manned primarily as “chain of command” units with officers and noncommissioned officers only, would serve a dual purpose to both deploy overseas to advise, assist, and help train partners and allies and also as a means to expand the Army in the case of emergency but adding soldiers to the brigade’s existing chain of command to form a BCT. Furthermore, General Milley noted before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April 7, 2016 that “manning requires an appropriate mix of forces across the Army—Regular Army, Army National Guard, and the Army Reserve—to accomplish our national military objectives”<sup>26</sup> suggesting that additional end strength decisions also need to consider Army force mix as well.

Without knowing specifics on the types of units and organizations that would be the beneficiaries of an end strength increase—as well as what component—it is difficult to ascertain the impact on readiness. An important factor is that of operational tempo. If the Army is committed to additional operations or if troop levels in existing operations are increased, additional end strength could be helpful as General Milley has indicated. Perhaps one of the most important considerations of additional end strength is that of additional funding to support readiness. On February 24, 2016 when asked about a possible increase to Army end strength during a Senate Appropriations Committee hearing, General Milley reportedly stated “I think that having increased numbers would help out readiness, if and only if we had the money to support that.”<sup>27</sup> If end strength is increased but readiness funding is either inadequate or not provided, the Army could have difficulty paying for their training and equipment.

## **National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFEA)**

Title XVII of the FY2015 NDAA established an independent commission to study Army strength and force structure and directed it to:

...undertake a comprehensive study of the structure of the Army, and policy assumptions related to the size and force mixture of the Army, in order—

(A) to make an assessment of the size and force mixture of the active component of the Army and the reserve components of the Army; and

(B) to make recommendations on the modifications, if any, of the structure of the Army related to current and anticipated mission requirements for the Army at acceptable levels

<sup>25</sup> Information in this section is taken from Courtney McBride, “Milley Pushes to Stand Up Train, Advise, and Assist Brigades,” *Inside Defense*, June 23, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Statement by the Honorable Patrick J. Murphy, Acting Secretary of the Army and General Mark A. Milley, Chief of Staff, United States Army, Before the Committee on Armed Services United States Senate, On the Posture of the United States Army, April 7, 2016, pp.5-6.

<sup>27</sup> C. Thomas Lopez, “Increased Manpower Must Come with Funding,” *Army News Service*, February 24, 2016.

of national risk and in a manner consistent with available resources and anticipated future resources.<sup>28</sup>

The committee report which accompanied the Senate version of this NDAA explained the rationale for the commission as follows:

The committee is aware that the Army and the Department of Defense continue their analysis, course of action development, and decisionmaking process with respect to the distribution of reductions of both end strength and force structure necessary to achieve the savings required by the Budget Control Act of 2011. The committee believes that under these circumstances an independent and objective review of Army size and force structure by a national commission is worthwhile. The commission would be required to submit a report to the congressional defense committees not later than February 1, 2016.<sup>29</sup>

The NCFR reported its findings to Congress and the Administration on January 28, 2016. The 208-page report contained 63 recommendations, many of which could have an impact on Army end strength. Major end strength-related recommendations are summarized below:

- An Army of 980,000 soldiers (Regular Army of 450,000; Army National Guard of 335,000; and an Army Reserve of 195,000) is the minimally sufficient force to meet current and anticipated missions with an acceptable level of risk. This finding is consistent with the end strength and force mix minimums established by Army leadership in 2014.<sup>30</sup>
- The Army should retain an eleventh Regular Army Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) instead of drawing down to ten CABs as proposed under the Aviation Restructuring Initiative (ARI).<sup>31</sup>
- The Army should convert the U.S. Army Europe administrative aviation headquarters to a warfighting mission command element similar to a CAB headquarters.<sup>32</sup>
- Noting the security situations in Ukraine and Syria, concern was expressed that no short-range air defense battalions were in the Regular Army and a sizeable percentage of the National Guard's short-range air defense capability was devoted to protecting the National Capital Region, leaving little spare capacity for contingency operations.<sup>33</sup>
- Shortfalls were identified in tactical mobility; missile defense; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense—particularly as it relates to homeland defense; field artillery; fuel distribution; water purification; Army watercraft; and military police.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (P.L. 113-291).

<sup>29</sup> S.Rept. 113-176, p. 245.

<sup>30</sup> Report to the President and Congress of the United States, National Commission on the Future of the Army, January 28, 2016, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

- If the Army’s 980,000 soldier strength cannot be increased to address the creation of units to address the aforementioned shortfalls, the Army should consider eliminating two Regular Army Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) to free up spaces to create these units.<sup>35</sup>
- The Army should increase Armored Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) capacity based on current and projected threat environment.<sup>36</sup>
- The Army should ensure Combatant Commands (COCOM) and Army Service Component Commands have the ability to provide operational mission command in proportion to the unique mission for each COCOM.<sup>37</sup>
- Regarding the Army’s proposed Aviation Restructuring Initiative (ARI), the commission recommended the Army maintain 24 manned AH-64 Apache battalions—20 in the Regular Army and 4 in the National Guard.<sup>38</sup> To help decrease the costs to the commission’s recommendation, only 2 UH-60 Black Hawk transport helicopter battalions would be added to the National Guard as opposed to the 4 Black Hawk battalions under the Army’s ARI proposal.

### **Implications of the NCFA’s Recommendations on Army End-Strength**

The NCFA’s findings on shortfalls in air defense; tactical mobility; missile defense; chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) defense; field artillery; fuel distribution; water purification; Army watercraft; and military police have potential implications for Army end strength. Depending on the Army’s analysis, it could choose to create a number of units of varying size (likely ranging from company to brigade-sized) to address the aforementioned shortfalls as well as other recommendations such as an eleventh CAB or increased ABCT capacity. Required personnel aside, the creation of these units would likely not be done “immediately” but instead over a number of years, based on the perceived urgency of the capability shortfall and dependent on the availability of necessary weapon systems, combat vehicles, and equipment needed to outfit new units.

The Army has three basic ways of creating new units or adding capacity to existing units—it can convert existing units to create new units or add capacity; it can deactivate existing units to free up personnel and equipment resources to create new units or add capacity; or it can ask for additional end strength and associated readiness funding to create new units or add capacity. Converting existing units considered excess or no longer relevant to perceived operational needs is considered the “easiest” option and the Army did a significant number of unit conversions when it instituted Modularity in 2003 to meet rotational demands of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, following the Army’s significant downsizing since 2010, fewer units are likely candidates for conversion. In a similar manner, deactivating units to free up personnel and equipment resources for new units/additional capacity might also prove impractical, as evidenced by the Army’s reluctance to deactivate two Regular IBCTs.

Army leadership has indicated that the NCFA’s recommendation of eliminating two Regular Army Infantry Brigade Combat Teams (IBCTs) to free up spaces to create new units is not

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> See CRS Report RL32476, *U.S. Army’s Modular Redesign: Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

practical or desired.<sup>40</sup> The Army's report to the Department of Defense (DOD) on which NCFA recommendations it plans to implement was reportedly provided to the Secretary Defense in mid-April 2016.<sup>41</sup> However, DOD's response has not yet been publically released. This being the case, additional end strength is an option to meet capability and capacity shortfalls.

Finally, independent from the NCFA's recommendations, the Army might also have internally identified additional units or capacity that it believes are needed to meet current and projected national security needs that might also have an impact on Army end strength requirements.

## **Budgetary Constraints and Options for Funding Additional Strength<sup>42</sup>**

The Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) established statutory limitations on spending by imposing a series of caps on discretionary budget authority for defense and nondefense programs from FY2012 through FY2021.<sup>43</sup> For FY2017, the BCA cap on defense spending limits the DOD military budget to \$523.9 billion.<sup>44</sup> The President's FY2017 budget request allocated the \$523.9 billion in available funding across the military departments. The Army's share of the allocation, \$123 billion, is distributed across appropriation titles (military personnel; operation and maintenance (O&M); research, development, test and evaluation (RDT&E); and military construction/other accounts) as depicted in **Figure 2**.

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<sup>40</sup> Jen Judson, "Milley: Cutting IBCTs is a "Bad Tradeoff" for Manpower Distribution," *Defense News*, March 3, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Jen Judson, "Future of Army Report to Hit Carter's Desk Next Week," *Army Times*, April 7, 2016.

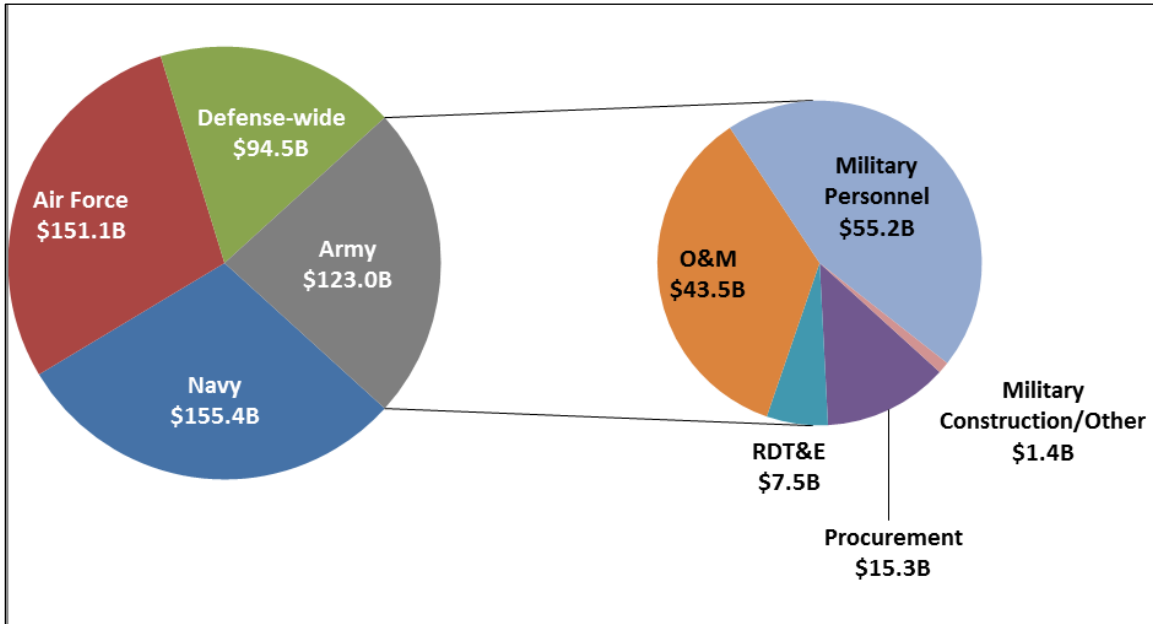
<sup>42</sup> This section authored by Lynn Williams, Analyst in U.S. Defense Budget Policy, [lmwilliams@crs.loc.gov](mailto:lmwilliams@crs.loc.gov), 7-0569.

<sup>43</sup> P.L. 112-25. For more information on the BCA see CRS Report R42506, *The Budget Control Act of 2011 as Amended: Budgetary Effects*, by Grant A. Driessen and Marc Labonte.

<sup>44</sup> For more information on the effect of the BCA caps on the FY2017 budget request see CRS Report R44379, *FY2017 Defense Budget Request: In Brief*, by Lynn M. Williams and Pat Towell and CRS Report R44454, *Defense: FY2017 Budget Request, Authorization, and Appropriations*, by Pat Towell and Lynn M. Williams.



**Figure 2. Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2017 Base Budget Request**  
Dollars in Billions



**Source:** Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2017 Defense Budget Overview, Table A-10.

**Notes:** O&M stands for operation and maintenance. RDT&E stands for research, development, test, and evaluation. "Other" amounts include family housing and revolving/management funds. Numbers do not add due to rounding.

As indicated above, the Administration's request for a \$523.9 billion military budget matches the BCA cap. Should Congress decide to increase the size of the Army beyond the level funded by the President's budget, the increase would need to be accompanied with an associated increase in budget authority for the Army or sufficient reductions from other Army accounts. Options for doing so are discussed below.

In contemplating increased Army end-strength, Congress may consider costs by type of Army unit the personnel may be assigned to. Doing so would account for variances in organizational structure (officer to enlisted ratios), training requirements, and assigned equipment requirements which affect the annual average cost of the unit. For example, an active duty infantry brigade combat team (BCT) is typically comprised of about 4,230 personnel (mainly enlisted) and several hundred generally unarmored wheeled vehicles. The average annual direct cost per troop in such a brigade is estimated at \$106,383.<sup>45</sup> In comparison, an active duty Aviation Brigade is typically comprised of 3,020 personnel, many of whom are officers or warrant officers, and is outfitted with a fleet of helicopters and the associated support equipment.<sup>46</sup> As result, the average annual direct cost per troop for an Aviation Brigade is estimated at \$162,252 (or 53% more). See **Table 2** for a comparison of average annual cost per troop by selected unit type.

<sup>45</sup> Congressional Budget Office, *The U.S. Military's Force Structure: A Primer*, Washington, DC, July 2016, <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/51535>, p. 32-35.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.



**Table 2. Size and Cost of Selected Active Army Units**

Unit	Military Personnel per Unit <sup>a</sup>		Annual Cost per Unit <sup>b</sup>		Average Cost per Troop <sup>c</sup>	
	Direct	Total	Direct	Total	Direct	Total
Armored BCT	4,200	17,450	\$500,000,000	\$2,610,000,000	\$119,048	\$149,570
Stryker BCT	4,440	17,180	\$500,000,000	\$2,560,000,000	\$112,613	\$149,010
Infantry BCT	4,230	16,250	\$450,000,000	\$2,410,000,000	\$106,383	\$148,308
Aviation Brigade	3,020	4,300	\$490,000,000	\$890,000,000	\$162,252	\$206,976

**Source:** Congressional Budget Office, *The U.S. Military's Force Structure: A Primer*, Washington, DC, July 2016, <http://www.cbo.gov/publication/51535>, p. 1, Table 1, and p. 36.

**Notes:**

- a. Direct military personnel are those assigned to the brigade. Total military personnel includes those assigned to the brigade, those assigned to units that support the brigade, and those representing the brigade’s share of administrative and overhead activities.
- b. See footnote a, above, for the distinction between direct and total. The cost per unit estimate includes only operations and support (O&S) costs, which include compensation for military personnel and most civilian personnel, health care costs for military and civilian personnel, equipment maintenance, training, support contractors, and other costs related to daily operations. The cost per unit estimate does not include costs for the development and purchase of major weapons systems, upgrades to existing systems, or construction costs.
- c. These figures represent the relevant “cost per unit” figure divided by the “military personnel per unit” figure.

**Raise the BCA Caps**

If an increase in the size of the Army is desired, Congress could raise or repeal the BCA caps, which it has done three times since the BCA was enacted in 2011. In 2012, 2013, and 2015 the limits on defense and nondefense spending were raised—each time adjusting only the limits for the two succeeding years.<sup>47</sup> **Figure 3** depicts the changes to the BCA limits on defense spending.

**Figure 3. Revisions to Defense Spending (050) Limits**

billions of dollars

Defense Spending Caps												
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Budget Control Act of 2011	552	552	555	492	502	512	523	536	549	562	576	590
American Taxpayer Relief Act of 2012	552	552	555	518	498	512	523	536	549	562	576	590
Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013	552	552	555	518	520	521	523	536	549	562	576	590
Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015	552	552	555	518	520	521	548	551	549	562	576	590

**Source:** CRS Analysis of P.L. 112-25, P.L. 112-240, P.L. 113-67, and P.L. 114-74.

<sup>47</sup> Amendments to the BCA limits were made by the American Taxpayer Relief Act (P.L. 112-240), the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2013 (P.L. 113-67) and the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 (P.L. 114-74).

**Note:** Federal budget function 050 funds National Defense. The DOD military portion of 050 is approximately 95% of function 050, with the remaining 5% funding defense-related nuclear energy activities and other agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations. Table highlights indicate a change was made to the original caps.

### Designating the Increase as a “OCO/GWOT” Requirement

Without an increase to the BCA limits, another alternative is to fund the increased force structure by designating it as an “emergency” or for “Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terror” (OCO/GWOT) requirements.<sup>48</sup> Doing so would exempt the funding from the BCA limits. This approach was supported by the House in passage of H.R. 4909, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017.<sup>49</sup> The measure provided an additional \$18.0 billion in funding for base requirements of the DOD and designated the funding as OCO/GWOT for the purposes of the BBEDCA exemption. In addition to \$1.6 billion in funding for Military Personnel in the Army (active and reserve components), H.R. 4909 also increased Army procurement, O&M, and RDT&E (see Table 3).

**Table 3. H.R. 4909 Increases to Army Base Accounts Using OCO**

Dollars in millions

Account	Amount
Military Personnel, Army (end strength to 480K)	\$1,123.5
Military Personnel, Army Reserve (end strength to 350K)	\$303.7
Military Personnel, Army National Guard(end strength to 205K)	\$166.7
Aircraft Procurement	\$1,060.2
Missile Procurement	\$196.1
Wheeled & Tracked Combat Vehicle Procurement	\$267.1
Ammunition Procurement	\$287.7
Other Procurement	\$106.8
Research, Development, Test & Evaluation	\$63.7
Operation & Maintenance, Army	\$2,294.9
Operation & Maintenance, Army Reserve	\$220.9
Operation & Maintenance, Army National Guard	\$326.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,417.4</b>

**Source:** H.R. 4909 Sections 4103, 4203, 4303 and 4403.

This approach has been criticized by some, mainly because OCO funding is not a guaranteed source of funding in future years. Secretary of Defense Carter, in testimony before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, called the House proposal to fund base requirements out of OCO as “deeply troubling and flawed” and went on to explain, “It buys force structure

<sup>48</sup> Funding designated as “emergency” or for “Overseas Contingency Operations/Global War on Terror” in accordance with the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985 (BBEDCA), as amended, are not subject to the BCA caps. See 2 U.S.C. 901 and 902. For more information on the BBEDCA and exemptions from the deficit control measures of the BCA, see CRS Report R44519, *Overseas Contingency Operations Funding: Background and Status*, coordinated by Lynn M. Williams and Susan B. Epstein.

<sup>49</sup> H.R. 4909

without the money to sustain it and keep it ready, effectively creating hollow force structure, and working against our efforts to restore readiness.”<sup>50</sup>

## **Reductions to Other Military Departments**

Funding an increase to Army end strength through a reduction to the other military departments’ budgets is another option; however, reducing funding to the other departments might have an adverse impact on their combat capabilities, readiness, and the joint force overall. The FY2017 Defense Budget Overview describes the rationale behind the President’s request, which provided for an Army of 980,000 soldiers.

With continuing fiscal and strategic uncertainty, the FY2017 budget request reflects the Department’s responsible choices to develop a coherent defense program with the proper balance between capacity, capabilities, and current and future readiness....This budget adjusts programs that support joint force technological superiority, stabilizes total ground force end strength, funds important reforms of health care, retirement, and family programs, focuses on building the force of the future, and continues to make better use of defense resources through acquisition reform, management reform, and reducing lower priority programs to comply with the Bipartisan Budget Act.<sup>51</sup>

If increases to Army end strength were to be funded by reductions to the Department of the Air Force, the Department of the Navy or both, Congress may consider risk to the Joint force’s ability to meet mission requirements in other areas, such as countering advanced anti-access and area-denial capabilities, nuclear deterrence, space, missile defense, cyber, precision strike, and special operations.<sup>52</sup>

## **Reductions to Other Army Accounts**

Another option to pay for additional Army end strength would be to reduce Army spending in other area, but this approach could have a negative impact on Army readiness, depending on where the spending reductions were applied. For example, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates warned an audience at the American Enterprise Institute in May 2011 about the potential for a “hollow force” if budget limitations are not applied in a manner that balances the size of the force, with the readiness of the force:

I am determined that we not repeat the mistakes of the past, where the budget targets were met mostly by taking a percentage off the top of everything, the simplest and most politically expedient approach both inside the Pentagon and outside of it. That kind of “salami-slicing” approach preserves overhead and maintains force structure on paper, but results in a hollowing-out of the force from a lack of proper training, maintenance and equipment—and manpower. That’s what happened in the 1970s—a disastrous period for our military—and to a lesser extent during the late 1990s.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Testimony before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense, *Hearing to Review the Fiscal Year 2017 Funding Request and Budget Justification for the Department of Defense*, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., April 27, 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Department of Defense Fiscal Year 2017 Defense Budget Overview.

<sup>52</sup> These were all listed in DOD’s Defense Budget Overview as “key capability areas” it was attempting to develop and protect. See FY17 Defense Budget Overview, p. 2-3, available here: [http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017\\_Budget\\_Request\\_Overview\\_Book.pdf](http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2017/FY2017_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Remarks on Defense Spending Delivered at the American Enterprise Institute, May 24, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1570>. For more on a “hollow force” see CRS Report R42334, *A Historical Perspective on “Hollow Forces”*, by Andrew Feickert and Stephen Daggett.

Secretary Gate's comments are applicable in consideration of increasing the size of the Army while the BCA caps constrain availability of funds to train, equip, sustain and modernize the larger force. General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff told the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense "To me, the number one priority that we have today is to make sure whatever size force we have is capable....So, trying to achieve that balance [Senator] is really what this year has been all about."<sup>54</sup> The National Commission on the Future Army raised similar concerns. Commenting on the President's FY2017 budget request in their final report, the Commission cautioned:

In this constrained budget environment, the Army prioritized manpower numbers and force readiness to hedge against near-term demands, accepting substantial risk in modernization. The Commission finds this solution regrettable but understandable; given the persistence of challenges to the United States and the ongoing strain those challenges are putting on ground forces.... Nevertheless...these risks to modernization cannot be sustained if the Army is to protect the mission readiness of the force in the long term.<sup>55</sup>

### **Fund the Increase through "Savings"**

Another alternative to funding an increase in Army end strength without an increase in defense spending is to find "savings" in existing DOD activities. In its annual consideration of defense authorization and appropriation bills, Congress routinely identifies programs that are under-executing (carrying unobligated balances), economic factors such as changes in the cost of fuel and foreign currency fluctuations, and activities that can be deferred. Congress may consider targeted reductions such as those to fund—in whole or in part—a desired increase in the size of the Army.

## **Key Questions**

The Department of Defense plans further reductions in the size of the Army, proposing a FY2018 end strength of 450,000. To reconcile competing interpretations and judgments about the proper size of the Army, Congress may gather additional information from the Army and outside experts. Some key questions Congress may pose to them include the following:

### **What are the appropriate roles and missions of the Army in achieving national strategic objectives?**

Although the international security environment is arguably becoming more challenging and complex, the role of ground forces—relative to other services—in helping the nation meet those challenges is somewhat unclear. What are the tasks that the Army, specifically, needs to accomplish for the nation? Within a coalition context? On behalf of the other U.S. military services? Compounding matters, the U.S. has a somewhat precarious track record when attempting to predict the type and character of future conflicts. What might an agile Army force structure, capable of more rapidly adapting to future security challenges, look like?

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<sup>54</sup> Testimony before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Defense, *Hearing to Review the Fiscal Year 2017 Funding Request and Budget Justification for the Department of Defense*, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., April 27, 2016.

<sup>55</sup> National Commission on the Future of the Army, *Report to the President and the Congress of the United States*, January 28, 2016, p. 40.

## **What effect would additional end strength levels have on Army capabilities in comparison to the Army's planned force?**

At present, it is not known what types of new units the Army would create should it be provided with additional end strength, making it difficult to assess the benefit of any additional strength. What would the Army do with additional end strength? Would it build new units and, if so, what types? Would it augment existing units and, if so, in what ways? How would these units enhance the capabilities or capacity of the Army to perform essential missions? What existing capability gaps would be addressed? How quickly would the Army be able to field these new or augmented units? How would such plans coincide with or conflict with congressional priorities for Army force structure?

## **What additional resources are associated with end strength increases?**

Additional military personnel generates costs beyond their pay and benefits. When combined into units, they require additional funding for training, operations, equipment, maintenance, and travel so they can effectively conduct their designated mission. What additional resources would be associated with creating new units or augmenting existing units—for example, equipment, training, facilities, and funding? Is there excess equipment that can be used or would there also be a requirement to procure new equipment and major weapon systems? How long would it take to equip and train new units? How much would this cost?

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