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Policy decisions regarding the overhaul of the military made by civilian authorities during the second Obama administration have left the Army less prepared to accomplish its mission which is to fight and win the Nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders. Objectively looking at the facts of the two major areas explored, budgetary considerations and force level reductions, it can be concluded that the ground forces are less prepared now for the unknown conflicts of future battlefields in part because of the repeated mistakes of the past.

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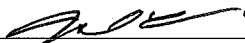
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Preface

I thoroughly enjoyed conducting this research project. Taking the time to understand the ways policies affect the Army from the highest level and all the way down to the end user has been an eye-opening experience. It has made me appreciate the nuance and difficulty of policy-level decision-making. During my research, I uncovered a lot of information on topics that I did not use in the final paper, but were nevertheless fascinating to learn about, so I appreciate the additional benefit of learning more about my service and its history.

I would like to thank a few people who helped me during my research. First, thanks to Dr. James Joyner, my faculty advisor, for his assistance, guidance, and patience, throughout this process. Secondly, thanks to the faculty at the Leadership Communication Skills Center, and specifically Dr. Linda DiDesidero for being there for me through all my revisions.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my beautiful wife, Meghan, and three amazing children, Teagan, Frankie, and Colette, for providing me the support to accomplish this project during such a demanding time in our personal lives. I love you all so much.

Executive Summary

Title: Analyzing the Downsizing of the Army

Author: John Mulholland

Thesis: Policy decisions regarding the overhaul of the military made by civilian authorities during the second Obama administration have left the Army less prepared to accomplish its mission which is to fight and win the Nation's wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders.

Discussion: Since 2012, the United States Army has been in a constant state of reduction. This was partially a reaction to the drawing down of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and a judgement that future fights would not involve large-scale ground combat. The Budget Control Act of 2011 exacerbated the drawdown process as it unsparingly slashed budgets wholesale across the government. The reduction in military spending drastically changed the path of the force reduction measures and caused readiness to decline in unanticipated ways. Military downsizing is a common occurrence at the end of major periods of conflict, but mistakes made in the past were repeated during the most recent instance. Training and resources were being stripped from a force downsized to its lowest point since 1940. Personnel mismanagement plagued the services, which complicated the military's readiness posture.

Conclusion: Objectively looking at the facts of the two major areas explored, budgetary considerations and force level reductions, it can be concluded that the Army is less prepared to accomplish its mission now and less prepared for the unknown conflicts of future battlefields in part because of the repeated mistakes of the past.

Introduction

Since 2001, the United States military has remained in continuous armed conflict around the world in global pursuit of terrorism; however, the large-scale, mass troop formation deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan are ostensibly over. While their work is filled with danger and requires sacrifice – aside from some elite special operations forces conducting counterterrorism missions – it is assumed that service-members on today’s battlefield are more apt to serve in an advisory role to a host-nation than on the front lines, although the spontaneous character of the war on terrorism makes requirements hard to predict. With the bulk of conventional fighting seemingly over, all branches of the armed forces are undergoing change and reformation in preparation for the next conflict. Restructuring force size and the reallocation of government funds is common after major periods of conflict and general comparisons from past experiences can be applied to today. Policy decisions regarding the overhaul of the military made by civilian authorities during the second Obama administration have left the Army less prepared to accomplish its mission, which is to fight and win the Nation’s wars by providing prompt, sustained land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders.¹

This paper will be broken down into two main sections. The first section will analyze the current financial situation, particularly the sequestration of the federal budget, the federal budget caps, and Continuing Resolutions, as the allocation of funds is directly tied to military readiness. The second section will compare drawdowns from past with the most recent. It is worth noting that reducing a force comprised largely of conscripts, as in the previous conflicts such as World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, is different than reducing the all-volunteer,

professional force of today; however, this paper will also review the reduction of the post-Cold War all-volunteer, professional military in the 1990s.

Budget Sequestration and Budget Caps

The Budget Control Act of 2011 established budget caps on discretionary spending between FY 2012 and FY 2021 and created the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, which is also referred to as the Super Committee. The Budget Control Act challenged the Super Committee to develop proposals to save \$1.5 trillion dollars over that ten-year period, and if it failed to do so, automatic spending cuts across defense and non-defense spending, called sequestration, would occur during FY 2013, and could theoretically take place every subsequent year unless some form of agreement could be reached.²

In FY 2013, in accordance with the Budget Control Act, the bipartisan failure to agree to a deficit reduction plan directly impacted national security. Congress was unable to work to a compromise, and approximately nine percent cuts were made across all government spending. The enactment of sequestration has thus far only occurred in FY 2013, and the resulting defense cuts were \$42.7 billion dollars. Some of the cuts that affected the military came by way of \$4 billion cuts in aircraft purchases, \$17.1 billion in military services, and \$6.1 in military research and development. Military salaries were exempt; however, benefits like tuition assistance and health care were not.³

In 2016, General Daniel B. Allyn, the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, claimed that sequestration was the number one risk to his service's readiness.⁴ While sequestration had been enacted only one time in the ways described above, it is continually used incorrectly, maybe as a scare tactic. The reality is that the uncertain fiscal environment has caused defense spending to be capped at a less than desirable level, which affects readiness, and more importantly, makes

efficient planning and spending impossible. Additionally, the uncertain fiscal reality forces the government to operate under a Continuing Resolution to prevent the reenactment of sequestration.

Continuing Resolution (CR) “maintains the current budget cap level of \$1.07 trillion put into place under the Budget Control Act of 2011.”⁵ CR also provides Overseas Contingency (OCO) funding for the Department of Defense which is money designed to “fight ISIS and terror around the globe, to provide essential resources that will ensure our national security, and to increase the readiness of our troops.”⁶ While OCO funding is designed to fund specific requirements that were not previously planned for because of emerging requirements, the Army has found ways to spread that money around to compensate for inadequacies in the baseline budget.

Impacts on Army Readiness

Although CR funding is essential to maintain operations, its short-term focus denies the force the ability to effectively plan. The unpredictable nature of funding over the past four years has overly constrained military leaders who have to make difficult prioritization decisions that affect combatant commanders’ ability to meet mission requirements. Expedited reductions in overall end strength, delaying modernization initiatives, and reducing infrastructure developments all negatively impact readiness and induce a high level of risk, specifically when planning future strategy.

In 2016, Army Chief of Staff, General Mark Milley, testified on Capitol Hill that more budget cuts would undermine plans to prepare for high-end threats. According to Milley, “an armor officer today – a tank officer up through rank of major – has very little experience in terms of maneuvering tanks against an opponent who has armor.”⁷ Fundamental skills have atrophied

during the last fifteen years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan while the focus has been on the current fight. While the deterioration in readiness is mainly attributable to years of warfighting, resourcing stymied the plan to remedy this shortfall. For example, the National Training Center had to cancel a quarter of its training rotations in FY 2013. Furthermore, the rotations that did occur did not meet the targeted, combat-focused, training expectations of then-Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel.⁸

The effect of the fiscal limitations, especially in the sequestration year 2013, but one that also carried over into 2014 and 2015, was the loss of funds dedicated to training. Only a select number of units had been designated to maintain a high state of readiness to respond to contingencies and everyone else atrophied. Training time lost due to an inability to perform maintenance on vehicles and aircraft, qualify on weapons systems, and gain overall experience required for career progression exacerbated the issue of maintaining resident expertise across a range of military specialties.⁹ While Army and Department of Defense leadership repeatedly vow to not return to a hollow, incapable force, they have chosen to maintain a force larger than they are capable of training well.

As displayed by sequestration, using budget process rules to achieve a political agenda fails to serve national security.¹⁰ The most important budgetary issue that needs to be resolved in regard to military readiness is to end the CR to allow the military to forecast requirements adequately to meet the national security needs. If the forecast demands more money than the system can provide then a baseline level of funding should be to where the military can field a capability and capacity that can defeat a known capability or capacity of a peer adversary. For example, the Russians have fielded the newest generation of tank in their T-14 Armada. While the Russian tank is unproven on the battlefield, the Foreign Military Studies Office in Fort

Leavenworth, Kansas, published a report advertising its capabilities as being able to withstand an impact from any kind of tank round in existence today as well as defeat the most modern munitions from the Apache helicopter. In addition to being well protected, the technology used for its targeting systems makes the tank nearly one hundred percent accurate.¹¹ This improvement in technology must factor into the battle field calculus of leaders should the United States be forced to fight the Russians. In this example, if the development of a new tank with the technology capable of defeating the T-14 is deemed too expensive to create or maintain, an alternative solution should be created to provide troops an advantage on the battlefield.

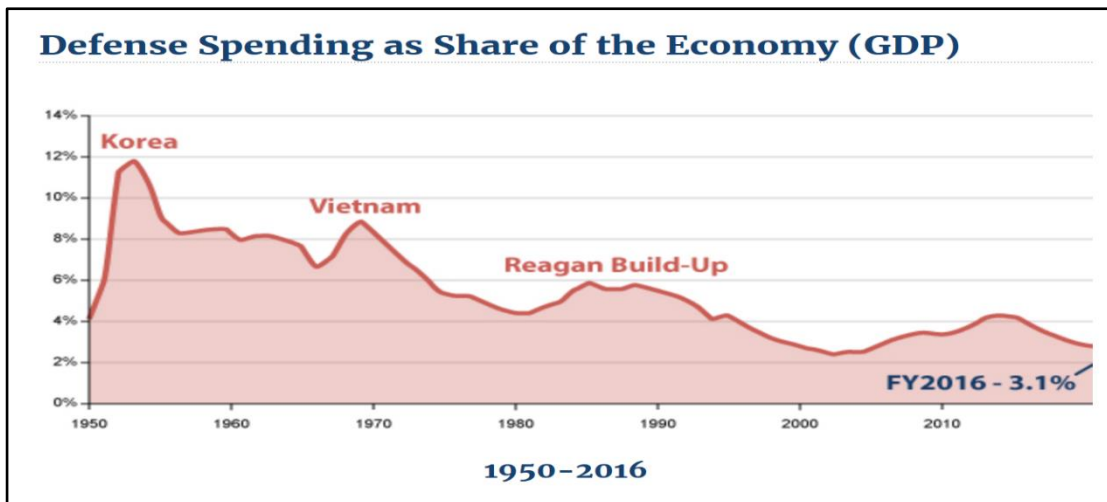


Figure 1: Defense Spending as Share of the Economy
(Source: US Department of Defense, *FY 2016 Budget Proposal*, Washington D.C., 2015.)

Defense spending is now a lower percentage of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) than it has been in the past and the current GDP percentage used on defense spending is similar to that of the peacetime state before 9/11.¹² However, total defense spending should reflect of the fluid and emerging military requirements of the global war on terror, as well as keep pace with advancements in technology and the changing capabilities of top adversaries around the globe.

Looking forward, the Trump administration has signaled that it wants to reestablish the military budget to be able to meet national security needs. Prior to his confirmation as the White House budget chief, Mick Mulvaney stated in his Senate hearings that changes needed to be made to enhance the defense budget by incorporating OCO funding into the base line budget.¹³ This train of thought assumes that the nature of our conflict will remain constant; however, as the next section will discuss, it is extremely difficult to predict future requirements. OCO funding has been relied upon to conduct standard training although the intent is for it to be spent purely on combat requirements, indicating a need for an increase in baseline budget for the current fight, and any future fights.

Senator John McCain, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, has also recently proposed a plan to increase the defense budget by \$430 billion dollars in the next five years stating “the cost of further inaction, however, is worse...should we find ourselves in conflict, our nation will be forced to send young Americans into battle without sufficient training or equipment to fight a war that will take longer, be larger, cost more, and ultimately claim more American lives than it otherwise would have. That is the course we are on.”¹⁴ Additionally, Defense Secretary James Mattis, echoed by President Trump, has stated that he wants to improve the readiness of the deteriorated force by rebuilding a larger, more capable, and more lethal one.¹⁵

Revamping the Army

Background

Despite President Barrack Obama stating during the official announcement on the reformation of the military that “...we have to remember the lessons of history. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past — after World War II, after Vietnam — when our military was

left ill-prepared for the future...”,¹⁶ these lessons have been relived. Many of the shortcomings of past reduction measures are reoccurring with the current drawdown and will be discussed in the following sections. Some of these overlapping themes that are having negative impacts on today’s Army are an overreliance on technology, a capitalization on perceived peace time conditions, and voluntary and involuntary separation processes.

Understanding history is important while attempting to look forward, so before delving into the impacts of current resizing, it is critical to briefly discuss the impact of previous changes to the size of the military. After World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, the Army, having grown exponentially through the draft to meet wartime requirements, reverted to a smaller peacetime force. Although the Army decreased significantly in size after Vietnam, it maintained a formidable size to counter the Cold War threat from the Soviet Union. By 1999, the Army decreased to sixty percent of its Cold War height to 479,726 soldiers, the lowest end strength since 1940.¹⁷

Past Drawdowns

The Army was massive by the end of World War II and needed to be reduced because there was no longer a need for a force of that size. Between 1945 and 1950, the Army had been reduced to roughly one-sixteenth of what it had been by the end of the war, from approximately 8.2 million to approximately 593,000 soldiers. While downsizing was required, pressure to “bring the boys home” created such a rapid reduction in force that the Army was unable to execute its detailed demobilization plan.¹⁸

This hasty downsizing, coupled with civilian leaders failing to provide guidance for what the military of the future was to look like, resulted in an unprepared Army that suffered during the early stages of the Korean War in June, 1950 when the Army nearly tripled in size to meet its

new objectives.¹⁹ The critical warning from the Korean War experience was that the US could not anticipate a very-near threat scenario that started within a year of the drawdown ending. Lessons like the failure of the ill-prepared Task Force Smith are frequent topics of professional development in infantry battalions to remind young Army officers on the dangers of committing troops to combat without forces being ready. While it is an unrealistic expectation to predict the future today, if senior civilian and military leaders continually state that the military is undermanned and under-resourced for a fight it is currently in, it can be deducted that the problem will be magnified with the emergence of any future threat.

After the stalemate of the Korean War, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, retired General of the Army, opted for a new strategy for facing future adversaries, namely the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. He called his strategy the New Look, which hinged on a massive nuclear retaliation against conventional provocation. The aggressive response was designed to discourage even minor altercations. This policy advocated for the use of aircraft to deliver atomic munitions to the battlefield, therefore favoring the Air Force and the Navy. The Army struggled with its future role in the nuclear age at all levels, evident by General Matthew Ridgeway, Chief of Staff of the Army, serving only two years in position due to his objection to the policy.²⁰

The Army that remained after the implementation of the New Look was expected to maintain a high state of readiness because of the increased tension with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.²¹ The Army spent the period between the Korean War and the Vietnam War developing organizations, weapons, and doctrine focused on nuclear war and mechanized conventional fighting. Even with the narrow focus, the Army was still challenged to

adjust properly because its budget limited the extent to which it could train towards its mission essential tasks.²²

Ultimately, the budget did not impact the Army in its next fight as much as what it prioritized for training. The Army was at a higher level of preparedness before Vietnam than it had been before entering World War II.²³ Unfortunately the Army had been preparing for maneuver warfare in Europe, and soldiers were unprepared for jungle warfare against a complex enemy. While it was reasonable for the Army to have focused training on large-scale conventional war against the Soviets because they were the most likely threat, it limited its ability to conduct the full range of military operations.

After Vietnam, the military also went through a drastic reduction in the size of the force, however, for different motivation. Richard Nixon's administration shifted the national military strategy from having the capability to simultaneously fight two and a half wars, to being able to fight one and a half wars. Additionally, to add a wrinkle into the reduction plan, the Nixon administration called for a purely all-volunteer force which ultimately came into action during his second term.²⁴ The Army intended to systematically reduce the ranks in a manner which would objectively determine who was fit to serve and who was not.

But as in the years following World War II, pressure for a hasty reduction mounted, and the Army lost control of its planned execution strategy when Congress ordered an immediate 50,000-man reduction half way through FY 1972.²⁵ Despite this fact, the transition to an all-volunteer force was deemed successful in July, 1974; however, the years between 1974 and 1983 were a difficult time for the transition. Recruiting became difficult during the second half of the 1970s, in part because of added restrictions on accepting non-high school graduates and baseline

medical conditions, and the Army failed to retain the anticipated number of volunteers and career enlisted members.²⁶

The methods of reduction created experience gaps throughout the ranks as combat-seasoned veterans were let go and there was no concerted effort to retain top talent. A vignette that highlights the inconsistencies is when General Westmoreland, then-Chief of Staff of the Army, told an Officer Advanced Course class that the drawdown was to get rid of the waste in the Army. An irony that the General was unaware of was that a large portion of these officers were marked for dismissal from the Army.²⁷

These men believed they had been selected for continued service as evident by their selection to higher professional education. They arrived to class one day to see their names listed on a document taped to the door stating that they were to be out of the Army in three months. The abrupt and confusing manner to which these officers were notified even led to a young captain, who was being released from service, embarrassing the General during his speech. The captain asked if he was being discharged because he was the waste being referred to.²⁸ The all-volunteer force was near disaster in 1979, and it was not until 1982 that trends reversed and the Army could retain and recruit its authorized numbers consisting of quality soldiers.²⁹

The Army was technologically sophisticated, highly trained, and well-led by 1990. The Army fought successfully in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and the end strength was around 700,000 soldiers.³⁰ The George H. W. Bush administration attempted to capitalize on a “peace dividend”, a term meant to describe the economic benefit of reducing spending on defense in favor of other sectors, after Operation Desert Storm and the Cold War. The strategy called for the shrinking of each cohort group that was eligible for promotion within the military to a certain

level. Voluntary incentive programs were offered for those willing to depart the service early, and involuntary separation tools were used to achieve size objectives. The active Army shrank from 777,000 to 495,000 soldiers under this initiative.³¹

The impact of this reduction had lasting effects specifically on the officer corps. By the end of the reduction period the officer corps went from 90,000 to 69,000.³² While the involuntary reduction methods were blunt, and caused resentment from those wishing to still serve, the voluntary methods offered a financially lucrative way to separate. This unfortunately created an environment in which talented officers whom the Army wanted to retain opted to take the money and leave.

Essentially, all attrition methods lacked an effective strategy to target subpar performers. The inflated Officer Evaluation Report (OER) system of the time contributed to this situation. Stellar performers and outright duds were clearly annotated on their OER, but the remaining members of the population were homogeneously grouped together. When more people needed to be separated from service than just the identified under-achievers, cuts were made from the homogenous center of mass population.

Fast-forward to the height of the Iraq War in the mid-2000s. The Army experienced an officer shortage at the rank of major when it expanded the size of the force because of the level of cuts to the same population in the 1990s. The Army was not able grow field grade officers at the same rate it could grow an enlisted soldier and it did not have the frame work in place to account for the rapid expansion required for the new brigade modular system.³³ The Army was forced to promote captains below the zone, and even double below the zone, to meet the manning requirements.

The Post Iraq/Afghanistan Drawdown

The present-day Army expanded in size to meet mission requirements for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the mid-2000s, and has since been decreased in size below the post-Cold War low. The reduction in size of the Army is greater than that of the Navy and Air Force partly because of the requirement for the Navy and Air Force to dominate the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) environment. Along with achieving these national security objectives, decisions about force size and budget allocations depend on funding. Air Force and Navy systems generate manufacturing jobs across the country, which is important to congressional districts, whereas soldiers are expensive to maintain and do not provide a huge benefit to politicians. Military personnel costs account for a quarter of the Department of Defense budget, and the Army makes up the bulk of those numbers, with populations that are deemed more to recruit and replace.³⁴ The logic was that the Army could afford to have a personnel shortage in certain specialties because a large amount of people can be trained in those areas in a relatively short amount of time if there was a need.

In January 2012, the Department of Defense released a new defense strategy that envisioned a rebalance of the Army's global distribution of assets and capabilities, as well as defined what the Army of the future was to be in terms of size. It called for a technologically superior, agile, and rapidly deployable force which ultimately came at the price of being smaller in overall end strength. A large standing army no longer seemed necessary because the bulk of the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan was supposedly being handled by the host nation, and a peace time drawdown in force size was to be expected. The Army was to reduce its overall end strength from a post-9/11 peak of 570,000 to 490,000 in five years, to be complete by the end of FY17.³⁵

The original plan to get to 490,000 soldiers considered the combat experience of the force, the improvements across the range of military operations to include special operations, cyber and information warfare, technological advancements, and the modularized brigade combat team structure. Four major points were highlighted during Army force structure decisions. The Army would sustain its structure in the Middle East and Pacific, meaning a significant land force would remain in Korea, and an operationally responsive ground force would remain in Kuwait.³⁶

The European posture was to change with two forward stationed brigades being eliminated. A new rotation of a US-based brigade would serve as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Response force on a rotational basis. Thirdly, the overall force did not need to conduct long-term stability operations anymore, but the reduction to 490,000 was to ensure the preservation of expertise in security force assistance and counterinsurgency. The fourth point focused on safeguarding the force for future adjustments by maintaining the requisite senior rank structure to allow for growth.³⁷

With the four major points described above as guidance, units were designated to be reorganized, realigned, or eliminated. Eight brigades were marked to be eliminated from the Army, to include two European based armored brigades. With geographic shuffling, remaining brigade combat teams were to be aligned to specific combatant commands. These remaining units were to conduct specific training to be prepared for these regions to include language skills and cultural awareness.³⁸

Prior to the impacts of the Budget Control Act, commanders and units did not feel detrimental impacts of force reduction measures because they were gradual, and perhaps even felt that they were beneficial. The drawdowns generally targeted the deadlock of soldiers in the

disability evaluation system, as well as those problem soldiers with discipline issues. Those who had a history of misconduct, fitness standard failures, and weight control standard failures were easy cuts for the Army to make. Additionally, the quota for recruitment was lowered so through a natural progression of soldiers retiring and terminating service voluntarily, overall numbers would decrease on a reasonable glide path.³⁹

Unfortunately, with the accelerated timeline, the Army was forced to involuntarily select both officers and enlisted personnel with good service records who qualified for continued service to separate from the Army. This process also created the hollow force feel of the 1970s when such drastic reduction measures took place that Army leaders felt as if the force could not perform effectively in war. There was a sense that the force would sit stagnantly as it underwent a series of cuts.⁴⁰ A difference between the 1970s and this most recent drawdown is that there were still 300,000 more troops in the 1970s.

Reductions Measures

The FY15 fiscal budget released in January 2014 made it very clear that not only did the drawdown need to be expedited, but it had expanded the reduction requirement to lose an additional 70,000 troops by FY19. While the drawdown was already negatively impacting readiness from a personnel perspective, it was beginning to impact the Army's ability to carry out its mission in accordance with the national defense strategic guidance. The bare minimum number of soldiers required to accomplish this mission is 450,000, per former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Odierno, and the additional reduction of 70,000 would put the end strength at 420,000.⁴¹ Fortunately, in February 2014, then-Secretary of Defense Hagel recommended to the President to set end strength numbers between 440-450,000 soldiers, acknowledging the General's concerns.⁴²

The Army provided a plethora of options for soldiers – whether through voluntary or involuntary means – to meet the demands of the new rapid drawdown timeline. Selective Early Retirement Boards targeted lieutenant colonels and colonels not selected for advancement two times. Reduction-in-Force boards similarly targeted those with between six and twenty years of service. The Enlisted Qualitative Service Program provided the option for noncommissioned officers above the rank of staff sergeant to separate voluntarily instead of being reviewed for involuntarily separation.⁴³

The Voluntary Retirement Incentive, the Voluntary Separation Incentive, and the Special Separation Bonus were all different buy-out packages offered to service members who served between six and twenty years. The Temporary Early Retirement Authority allowed those in select grades and skills to retire with as few as 15 years of service in exchange for reduced retirement pay for every year under twenty. Finally, the Voluntary Early Release/Retirement Program enabled junior officers to resign their commissions without fulfilling their commitment, as well as allowed senior ranking officers to retire at their current rank with only two years in grade instead of three.⁴⁴

Analysis

While these various options attempted to fairly address financial concerns during the post Iraq/Afghanistan drawdown period, they did little to address the psychological aspect of being separated from an all-volunteer force. Young men and women had signed up to go to war for the United States since 2001 and committed not only their lives, but the lives of their families in service to the nation. These service members were contractually obligated to uphold certain beliefs, maintain certain standards, give up certain rights, and conduct dangerous missions, without question. Depending on if and how they were to break their oath to the nation, a

punishment as high as time in jail and a felony record could result. A sense of betrayal percolated through the ranks when service-members in good standing were let go.⁴⁵

Similarities to the Vietnam drawdown are summoned to mind, especially since tools like the Reduction-in-Force (RIF) boards were last used then. Vietnam-era soldiers felt that the RIF boards inaccurately selected those who were to go and those who were to stay,⁴⁶ a commonality felt today. A difference in the dynamic of the past, however, was that the public treatment of Vietnam veterans was generally apathetic and no special attempt was made to reintegrate them back into society. The public narrative towards today's service members is much different, with them categorized as America's heroes.

Wounded warriors are commended for their mental fortitude for persevering through injuries sustained at war, and many corporations and non-profit organizations dedicate time and resources to helping them. This public sentiment had limited effect on those who gave up their young adulthood, answering their nation's call, to be abruptly released from service.⁴⁷ Even though the volume of service members released during the Vietnam-era dwarfed that of this drawdown, these men and women felt just as discarded as those returning from Southeast Asia. The most recent drawdown is also like the post-Cold War drawdown because it inadvertently provided a rewarding opportunity for top quality officers to leave the service. The involuntary methods employed targeted the lower performers first, but as in the 1990s, the substantial financial benefits to leave voluntarily drew away quality performers who decided to take their talents elsewhere.

Even without another drastic event such as 9/11 sending the country back into large-scale ground operations operational tempo will increase for the smaller force. The reduction in force size does not equate to the reduction in requirements. Arguably, when units stationed in Europe

were deactivated it made an additional requirement for a unit that remained intact who now must deploy from the United States to fulfill the mission. Over time, asking the force to do more missions with less resources will continue to grind efficiency and effectiveness down.

Furthermore, proactively addressing future requirements will also remain limited as the force tries to handle existing missions. The future operating environment changes the allocation of manpower because the cyber, information and technological warfare domains are unlike any past environment. These fledgling disciplines will require a serious commitment to stay at the forefront. If force levels or budgeting are not adjusted as these domains become more developed, a logical deduction would be that force cuts must occur from within traditional military roles that are deemed more expendable. The balance between current and future operations will then come into question and inevitably complicate operational tempo. It is not to say that keeping a larger force for the sake of itself is the correct answer, but as part of a reduction, there should be a reinvestment into current or future capabilities such as more high-end training iterations and being fielded with more technologically superior equipment.

Service	FY 2016 Authorized	FY 2017		Change from	
		Request	Committee Recommendation	FY 2017 Request	FY 2016 Authorized
Army	475,000	460,000	480,000	20,000	5,000
Navy	329,200	322,900	324,615	1,715	-4,585
USMC	184,000	182,000	185,000	3,000	1,000
Air Force	320,715	317,000	321,000	4,000	285
DOD Total	1,308,915	1,281,900	1,310,615	28,715	1,700

Figure 2: End Strengths for Active Forces (Source: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Washington, D.C., May 4, 2016, 142.)

The Trump administration stated that it wants to increase the size and strength of the armed forces, ending the drawdown. Per the National Defense Authorization Act for FY17, which halts the downward trend, the authorized end strength for the Army will only minutely increase by one percent from the year before. The overall end strength for the Department of Defense is only increasing by one tenth of one percent, meaning the one percent gain for the Army is another service's loss.⁴⁸

Another unintended side effect of the drawdown was dysfunctional personnel management throughout the Army. Army assignment officers were not able to properly forecast personnel needs, which typically resulted in a surplus of officers standing by idly. A specific case of this was the manning cycle not properly synchronizing with the deactivation of a unit on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. Human Resources Command allocated a brigade's worth of field grade officers to be assigned to 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, even though it was being deactivated. Because of this, these officers did not have an opportunity to contribute in a qualifying job. These service members either had to wait out their turn to serve elsewhere on Joint Base Lewis-McChord, uproot their families to move to another installation, or find themselves unqualified for future service because, through no fault of their own, did not get a key assignment.⁴⁹

An additional instance of desynchronization occurred when the personnel office stopped assigning enlisted personnel to 4th Airborne Brigade Combat Team in Fort Wainwright, Alaska, because it thought the unit was being disbanded; however, it was supposed to remain a fully functional unit. This mismanagement made mission readiness and preparedness an unattainable goal until the Army Force Generation Cycle could account for the shortfall in personnel.⁵⁰ These instances may seem anecdotal and insignificant in the large picture of Army operations, but they

are representative of how disjointed the process was. The reality of having a smaller force is that the margin of error is reduced. Both brigades got back on track without any detrimental effects, but that does not negate the fact that scenarios like these limit options for senior leaders because of unit readiness.

Conclusion

Even though specifically addressed by President Obama when the drawdown plans were unveiled in 2012, the mistakes of the past unfortunately seemed to have repeated themselves. The original intent of systematically reorganizing, realigning, and eliminating units in favor of a more agile, capable force was abandoned when a looming budgetary crisis began to drive decisions. Time will determine how these decisions will impact the Army, because as in the past, the character of the next battlefield is unknown. Past administrations did not believe large-scale ground war would occur after we became a nuclear superpower, yet 58,000 lives were lost fighting in Vietnam.⁵¹ As strategies of the past have focused on technology instead of personnel, the current drawdown shows a devaluation of the one area where wars are decided, on the ground.

The purpose of this paper was to determine if policy decisions regarding the overhaul of the military made by civilian authorities during the second Obama administration have left the Army prepared to accomplish its mission. Believing that the current set of circumstances will dictate how the future will unfold is a detrimental strategy to follow and one that may be costly in blood. History has proven that we cannot dictate the character of the wars in which we fight, but prioritizing preparedness against known threats will provide more of an advantage than maintaining a force that prioritizes downsizing and cost saving measures. Objectively looking at the facts of the two major areas explored, budgetary considerations and force level reductions, it

can be concluded that the Army is less prepared to accomplish its mission now and less prepared for the unknown conflicts of future battlefields in part because of the repeated mistakes of the past.

The persistent problems with federal funding highlight how political dysfunction can disrupt the military's ability to maintain readiness, reducing overall combat effectiveness. Critical to everything the military does, whether it is training, equipping, or sustaining the force, is adequate levels of funding. Without it, leaders must weigh critical national security requirements against future projects and development programs, and when forced to choose, the future suffers. The political unwillingness to compromise on such an important issue has repercussions that will affect the continuing development of soldiers.

With troop levels being reduced to such low levels in an uncoordinated manner, there is a reduced level of combat readiness. The rapid reduction in force levels has caused most concern in the Army because it is at the lowest level possible to accomplish only the basic national security objectives in the near-term. Long-term ramifications of stripping the Army of qualified soldiers have created a talent gap that can only be remedied by future investment; however, the effects of the budget prevent this from being addressed.

The mismanagement of personnel was another side-effect of the force reduction measures that degraded combat readiness. When time is limited, dedicating vast amounts of resources to deactivating and reorganizing units will take away a unit's ability to remain combat ready. This is compounded when the people expected to do the job are not provided to a command in a beneficial manner. Logically it can be deduced that personnel can be shifted to make up for the shortfalls; however, these procedures take time, and since it is impossible to predict events like 9/11, time should not be taken for granted.

Force reduction and mismanagement also generate a level of mistrust amongst service members. Asking service members to uproot their lives to move across the country multiple times because of a mistake reduces the overall faith in the establishment. When qualified soldiers are forced out of service, it causes feelings of disloyalty to spread in a profession where loyalty is paramount. Instilling confidence in subordinates is an expectation of leaders at all levels throughout the military and it should also be an expectation from those who command them.

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¹⁸ David McCormick, *The Downsized Warrior* (New York: New York University Press 1998), 8-10.

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²² Ibid., 32.

²³ Ibid., 50.

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- ²⁵ Ibid., 11-12.
- ²⁶ Robert K. Griffith, *The U.S. Army's Transition to the All-Volunteer Force, 1968-1974*. Army historical series. Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 292.
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- ³⁸ Ibid., 3.
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- ⁴⁶ David McCormick, *The Downsized Warrior* (New York: New York University Press 1998), 11.
- ⁴⁷ Compilation of interviews with officers released from service, Phone interviews, November, 2016 – January, 2017.
- ⁴⁸ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Washington, D.C., May 4, 2016, 142.
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Figures

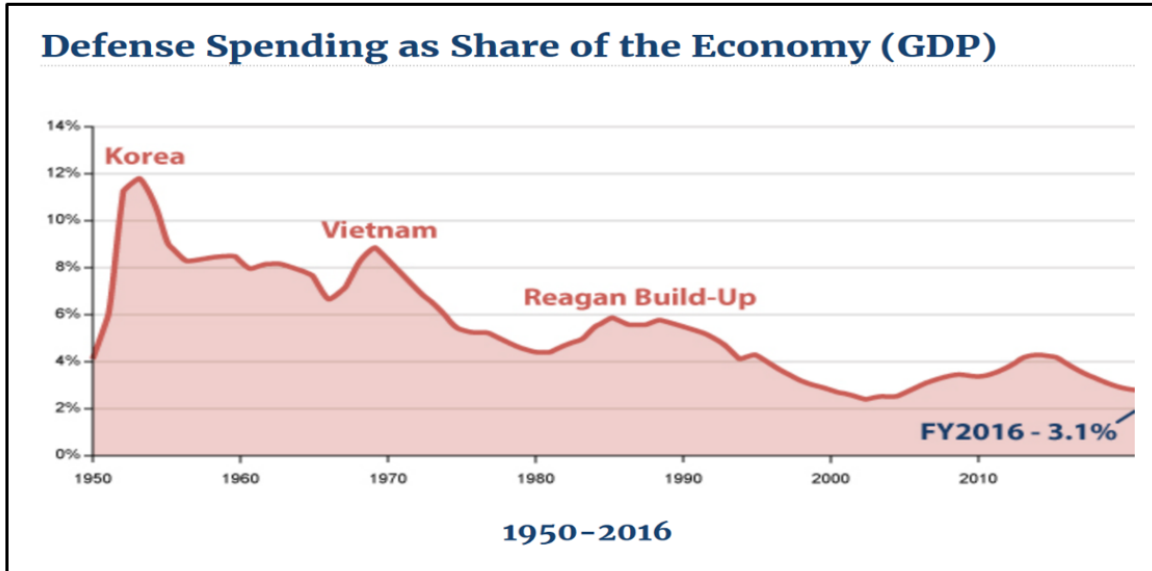


Figure 1: Defense Spending as Share of the Economy
 (Source: US Department of Defense, *FY 2016 Budget Proposal*, Washington D.C., 2015.)

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		Request	Committee Recommendation	FY 2017 Request	FY 2016 Authorized
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Figure 2: End Strengths for Active Forces
 (Source: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Washington, D.C., May 4, 2016, 142.)