

Combat Multiplier

Examining the Security Force Assistance Brigade's Role in Future Army Strategic Deterrence

by Major John Thomas Pelham IV, U.S. Army



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In Brief

- Current U.S. strategic commitments for forward-deployed forces place stress on the force generation and readiness of armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs). The Army could add more ABCTs to the existing force structure, but other options may be more feasible to ensure that the United States meets strategic obligations.
- Insufficient research and doctrine currently exist to identify which facets of the current mechanized rotational mission sets a security force assistance brigade (SFAB), Stryker brigade combat team (SBCT) or similar formation could assume from an ABCT or another mechanized unit. This study examines the feasibility of incorporating a new type of unit, the SFAB, into a rotational strategic deployment model conceptualized before the formation of the SFAB.
- This study creates an extensive dialogue for further research on the SFAB's future in the Army force structure and the evolution of the armored force as threats and operating environment advantages evolve and current technologies age.

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Introduction

The second decade of the twenty-first century introduced considerable challenges and dynamic change to both the U.S. Army and Marine Corps armored forces. Sequestration brought the first significant reduction in force for the U.S. military in a generation. The armored force experienced increased pressure as budgets and force structures were slashed to conform to new fiscal restraints. Concurrently, as U.S. strategic policy shifted to conventional Regionally Aligned Forces (RAF) deterrent rotations, Army armored brigade combat teams (ABCTs), Stryker brigade combat teams (SBCTs) and other mechanized forces faced greater demand than ever.

Current U.S. strategic force–deployment commitments place considerable stress on the force generation and readiness of ABCTs. The Army could add more ABCTs to the existing force structure; however, given the fiscal and materiel costs associated with doing so, other options may be more feasible to ensure that the United States meets these strategic obligations. Security force assistance brigades (SFABs) train and equip to satisfy much of the existing ABCT rotational mission set without costly force additions.

Study Overview

The purpose of this study is to provide the Army a combination of actionable options to current and future strategic and operational problems. Any combination of potential solutions offered can assist the Army enterprise in optimizing force structure and best fulfilling the Army strategic responsibilities of shaping environments, preventing conflict, prevailing in ground combat and consolidating gains. All solutions resulting from this study will be tailorable to specific theaters while remaining fundamentally applicable to supporting Army operations worldwide. This study examines the feasibility of incorporating a new type of unit, the SFAB, into a rotational strategic deployment model conceptualized before the formation of the SFAB. It seeks to highlight opportunities to employ this new formation for maximum efficacy while

simultaneously reducing the negative impact on the readiness of the armored force resulting from perpetual deployment. Recommendations to optimize the employment of U.S. mechanized and armored forces are also offered.

This study assesses the acceptability, feasibility, suitability and, perhaps most importantly, sustainability of integrating SFABs partially and completely into the RAF model in roles currently filled solely by ABCTs. The results of this assessment will also inform whether force generation of additional ABCTs is necessary and feasible in the event the other brigade combat team (BCT) types prove unsuitable. Finally, the study assesses the links between all findings to determine the necessity of the forward-postured strategic deterrent in its current means and ways.

Formations considered for integration into the RAF model are various configurations of the ABCT and SFAB only, short of generating additional ABCTs or eliminating the need for a strategic deterrent in its current form. The two BCT types not examined as a possible solution by this study are the SBCT and the infantry brigade combat team (IBCT). IBCTs are not included, given their inherent lack of mobility and firepower compared to the ABCT and their lack of ability to embed with partnered mechanized units compared to the SFAB.

This study aims to expand the interpretation of the strategic requirement for forward-postured forces and a corresponding expanded proposed menu of means to satisfy that requirement. It further seeks to offer solutions to current controversies involving SFAB force structure and to create an extensive dialogue for further research on the SFAB's future in the Army force structure and the evolution of the armored force—as threats and operating environment advantages evolve and current technologies age.

Potential Solutions

Many of the mission requirements currently filled by ABCTs as part of the three current strategic deterrence rotations can shift to SFABs. Notably, even as many armored brigades and regiments deactivated, enduring strategic deterrent rotations in the United States European Command (USEUCOM), United States Central Command (USCENTCOM) and United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) on the Korean Peninsula demanded that no fewer than three (often more) Army ABCTs deploy continuously. The increasing strategic demand on a dwindling supply of available mechanized forces created challenges in shifting from the Army Force Generation force management model to the Sustained Readiness initiative as units struggled to implement sustainable manning models against increased readiness requirements. This solution could reduce the burden on the American armored force and allow it to focus on the core competencies of the Decisive Action aspect of strategic deterrence in each respective Combatant Command (CCMD).

Army Modernization through 2028

In *Army at War: Change in the Midst of Conflict*, McGrath described how, even before 9/11, the Army was transitioning from an industrial army to a postindustrial one capable of fighting protracted campaigns across the full spectrum of conflict.¹ McGrath also pointed out that large-scale conventional battles had become an anomaly when compared to their rate of occurrence throughout U.S. military history. Current and future conflicts would bear less and less resemblance conversely.² This assertion has proven true, apart from isolated cases such as the Russian annexation of the Donbas region of Ukraine in 2014.³

Understanding the changing nature of conflict, Army leadership must be mindful when developing strategy for fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the *National Military Strategy* (NMS). Its ends should support the means at hand.⁴ Furthermore, as Schmitt argues in *A Hard Look at Hard Power: Assessing the Defense Capabilities of Key U.S. Allies and Security Partners*, any Army modernization area should strike a balance between force size and technological sophistication.⁵ In this case, the current amount of ABCTs in the Army force structure and the inception of permanent advise, assist, support, liaise and enable (AASLE) units in the SFABs should be present in the decision calculus. The operating environment has changed since the beginning of the RAF deployment model in 2013. Pre-positioned forces reduce sustainment costs in the short term, but expeditionary forces ultimately become more difficult to sustain over time as they move farther from their support areas. Costs of pre-positioned units stay constant over time, whether committed or not, whereas expeditionary forces incur costs only when used.⁶ Ultimately, the opportunity cost becomes one of response time versus cost of sustainment. The SFAB, though wholly expeditionary, still requires significant logistical support from its higher headquarters.⁷

In *Enabling Others to Win in a Complex World: Maximizing Security Force Assistance Potential in the Regionally Aligned Brigade Combat Team*, Captain Liam P. Walsh observed that the BCT in its current form, particularly the ABCT, was not suitable to optimally conduct the multiple partnered security force assistance missions demanded of the *Operation Spartan Shield* (OSS) rotational ABCT in USCENTCOM.⁸ Since Walsh's writing in 2015, the Army has added six dedicated advising brigades to the force structure. Any current or future modernization effort must acknowledge the increasing importance of partnered operations and the growing demand for leveraging partner capacity compared to the need for other capabilities in a future conflict.⁹

Implications for Future U.S. Strategic Deterrence

Every operation that the U.S. Army conducts both currently and into the future will be not only joint but likely multinational as well. It is unreasonable to think that conditions will change as the global community becomes increasingly interdependent. The importance of partner integration at all three levels of war will only increase. Dwight Eisenhower remarked that the future of warfare depends on partner integration.¹⁰ Likewise, as the need for partner integration increases, the need to pool resources across all elements of national power, particularly military, will be essential in reducing the demand on American national resources to allow the United States to honor its treaty commitments to allies more sustainably in an increasingly resource-constrained environment.¹¹

Partner integration is vital in mitigating strategic risk incurred from reducing conventional force numbers stationed overseas, as the April 2012 edition of the Congressional Research Service (CRS) study on Army restructuring described.¹² It is still important to note that the only rotation specifically recommended exclusively for ABCTs was *Operation Atlantic Resolve* (OAR) in USEUCOM. At the time of the recommendation, the May 2012 installment of the CRS restructuring study recommended specifically that a rotational ABCT align with USEUCOM as part of the NATO reaction force.¹³ As corroborated by the March 2013 draft of the CRS report, the "utility of engagement operations" can offset the need in terms of both risk and cost to commit large numbers of conventional forces to overseas deterrence missions by integrating greater numbers of partnered forces.¹⁴

The Power of Strategic Messaging

In the January–March 2018 edition of the *Aviation Digest*, Captain Zachary Johnston examined the power of strategic messaging on the effectiveness of strategic deterrence rotations such as OAR. Johnston explained that the type of unit was not as important as the messaging: it was the scale of partnered activity and the advertising of said activities that affected threat decision calculus more so than the type of units in a theater.¹⁵

In *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*, Hunzeker and Lanoszka explain that strategic deterrence ends, ways and means should mirror adversary intent, lest inappropriate means achieve the opposite effect and instigate conflict.¹⁶ To this end, Hunzeker and Lanoszka argue that determining the correct means to achieve strategic deterrence is, in fact, a balancing act between the capabilities needed to defeat a threat and capabilities needed to assure allies without instigating conflict.¹⁷ Walsh suggests a similar argument in *Enabling Others to Win in a Complex World: Maximizing Security Force Assistance Potential in the Regionally Aligned Brigade Combat Team*, that building partner capacity increases conventional military capabilities while simultaneously assuring allies.¹⁸ In other words, leveraging partner capacity builds security globally while lowering the risk of instigating conflict that comes with posturing large conventional formations.¹⁹

Within the Army’s strategic responsibilities of shaping environments, preventing conflict, prevailing in ground combat and consolidating gains, Walsh submits that conventional forces are more appropriate for preventing conflict against a conventional threat and carrying the risk of escalating conflict as well. Walsh argues that security force assistance units are more suitable for shaping environments.²⁰ Balancing capabilities to defeat a threat and assure allies likely means finding the right combination of forward-postured conventional and security force assistance forces, given the U.S. commitment to deployment as the preferred way to achieve deterrence across all levels of American strategy. As it is likely infeasible to regionally align Special Forces Groups to leverage partner capability fully,²¹ the Security Force Assistance Command (SFAC) regional alignment plan seeks to address the need for security force assistance task forces executing the assurance portion of U.S. strategic guidance. Furthermore, as the United States increasingly relies on partners to maintain the global security environment,²² SFAB advisors can also leverage greater partner conventional deterrent capabilities to relieve demand on U.S. conventional forces.

Balancing the Use of Allied Resources and U.S. Forward Presence

In *A Hard Look at Hard Power: Assessing the Defense Capabilities of Key U.S. Allies and Security Partners*, Schmitt describes the value of leveraging allied military resources to reduce the burden on the American military worldwide.²³ Schmitt admits that soft power means and ways are insufficient to fill the global “insecurity vacuum”; however, utilizing soft power to garner greater military commitment from allies is key to a more sustainable American strategic deterrence.²⁴ To this end, Schmitt offers that successful security force assistance and partnered interoperability training hold the key to preventing crises as a crucial complement to U.S. conventional forces.²⁵

However, security force assistance forces cannot negate the need for conventional U.S. forward presence. As Johnston asserts in the RAND Corporation study *Heavy Armor in the Future Security Environment*, any threat with standoff weapons capability—as Russia, China and Iran all possess—necessitates at least some heavy-force presence in a theater.²⁶ While true,

increasing adversary antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD) systems continue to make large conventional units difficult to project and sustain, as Johnson explains in his Land Warfare Paper *The Importance of Land Warfare: This Kind of War Redux*.²⁷ Johnson argues that the Army will be a means for conventional deterrence currently and in the future.²⁸ He further submits that land forces, using combined-arms maneuver, are necessary to make even modern hybrid adversaries visible and to defeat them.²⁹ The evolving threat nature necessitates reducing the size of forward-postured conventional forces to lower their target profile while employing them in an early warning or “speed bump” role to create reaction time and maneuver space for larger forces to deploy.³⁰

By decreasing the size of the conventional forward footprint, the United States retains a greater ability to convert military strength in continental United States (CONUS) locations to military power abroad while reducing risk to forwarding forces.³¹ Thus, the evaluation criteria for selecting forces for strategic deterrence rotations should be their credibility.³² For example, forward-deployed U.S. conventional forces in Europe in 2014 likely did not deter Russia from annexing the Crimean Peninsula or the Donbas, signaling that larger conventional deterrence forces are not necessarily appropriate to achieve a deterrent effect in the future.³³

Challenges

Having established the importance of multinational interoperability and the need for effective security force assistance forces in integrating partners going forward, the role for SFABs within the framework of U.S. strategic deterrence becomes clearer. In “Lessons Future Security-Force Assistance Brigades Should Consider,” James and Kydes emphasize the power of relationships within partnered operations, as well as the need for a flexible mission command suite, such as the SFAB’s organic communication architecture paired with the mental agility among advisors to employ it effectively.³⁴ James and Kydes offer that conventional BCTs by their very nature are susceptible to the “ugly American” style of advising that prioritizes effects over relationships.³⁵ In addition, the nine-month conventional deployment cycle makes it difficult to establish the continuity necessary to build the necessary relationships for effective interoperability. A specialized advising force must be part of any operation involving partner participation, and it must be committed for a longer term than that to which rotational BCTs are accustomed. James and Kydes point out the general need for consolidated intelligence, fires and sustainment support among most partner forces that advisor teams provide, compared to a BCT.³⁶

In a RAND Corporation study, *Leveraging Observations of Security Force Assistance in Afghanistan*, by Payne and Osburg, one senior American officer interviewed echoed James and Kydes’s “ugly American” advisor sentiment, saying that, in the Army, “you cannot take a BDE from a unit like the 82nd Airborne Division, which continually thinks about highly kinetic engagements and make them advisors capable of understanding complex human dynamics after just two weeks’ worth of training.”³⁷ In other words, the need for a dedicated advising force managing the critical partner aspect of strategic deterrence is paramount. Payne and Osburg also noted that specialized advising forces influence partner morale and enthusiasm to contribute a significant combat multiplier.³⁸ Equally important is the advisor unit’s ability to affect multiple countries and regions outside of the immediate operating environment via relationships and influence with partner forces. In contrast, a conventional maneuver force confines itself to the immediate area.³⁹ Considering these factors, Payne and Osburg argue that SFABs should habitually align with specific regions.⁴⁰

In the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies report *European Allies in US Multi-Domain Operations*, Watling and Roper explain that the increased risk posed by Russian and Chinese long-range fires capabilities “fracture” the U.S. Army’s Air-Land Battle, Full Spectrum Operations and the later Unified Land Operations doctrines by creating an area access/area denial network necessitating the pre-positioning of at least some U.S. conventional forces in a theater.⁴¹ Watling and Roper further submit that the key to successful forward posturing lies in building partner multi-domain operations capabilities, particularly in the areas of cyber, electronic warfare and long-range fires. In doing so, U.S. partners can offset the risk incurred from maintaining fewer conventional deterrent forces forward.⁴² Watling and Roper explain that U.S. Army endstrength is likely to decrease soon because of resource constraints and evolving technology, making partial reliance on partner capabilities in strategic deterrence increasingly inevitable.⁴³ To balance the need for forward conventional and security force assistance capabilities against threat capabilities, Watling and Roper recommend a “calibrated force posture” consisting of an appropriately sized and positioned force with the necessary capabilities held at the requisite readiness level.⁴⁴ Watling and Roper’s recommendation is compatible with “Line of Effort Four: Strengthen Alliances and Partnerships” of the *Army Strategy*, stating, “The Army will continue to train and fight with allies and partners, and therefore, we must strive to integrate them further into our operations to increase interoperability.”⁴⁵

In “The Theater Army Role in Multi-Domain Operations Integrated Research Project,” Dr. Gregory Cantwell states, “The actions taken to ‘set the theater’ determine the strategic options that will be available to achieve our national objectives. Those individuals that are not involved in the tough government work that ensures the right resources and agreements are in place before the start of an operation may not appreciate the efforts these actions require.”⁴⁶ Given the SFAB’s vital role in establishing partnered relationships and the SFAB brigade support battalion’s mobility expertise, it is not infeasible to assert the SFAB’s utility in setting a theater as an expeditionary unit.⁴⁷

Cantwell examines the cost associated with integrating Army National Guard units into strategic deterrence rotations such as OSS, noting that, while readiness and interoperability benefits exist, the fact remains that the Army is committing a portion of its operational reserve.⁴⁸ To that end, Cantwell relates the criticality of liaison officer billets in effective partnered operations,⁴⁹ an exact point given the SFAB’s doctrinal role of liaison within the AASLE framework to streamline the challenges of multinational operations.

An essay in Cantwell’s study by Colonel Shawn Underwood (USA) emphasizes George C. Marshall’s quote, “The time has come when we must proceed with the business of carrying the war to the enemy, not permitting the greater portion of our armed forces and our valuable material to be immobilized within the continental United States.”⁵⁰ The world security environment is vastly different now than in 1941. However, the current U.S. strategy of maintaining forces overseas to deter threats and assure allies demands the most efficient, sustainable mix of forces possible, as economic and fiscal resources will likely be more constrained in the future. Colonel Underwood’s essay within Cantwell’s study does, however, endorse the utility of the SFAB in reducing the burden on the Total Army force resulting from continuous deployment by assuming much of the assurance and partnered portions of the strategic deterrence mission set.⁵¹

Findings and Recommendations

Strategic Need for Forward-Deployed Forces

A thorough examination of strategies and supporting policy and strategic guidance across the grand strategic, institutional strategic and theater strategic levels held two general themes with few exceptions. The *National Security Strategy* (NSS), *National Defense Strategy* (NDS), NMS, the *Army Strategy* and USEUCOM/USCENTCOM/USINDOPACOM theater strategies, themes, and posture statements all commonly outlined the need for deterrence as key to protecting the United States and allied interests worldwide. Likewise, the same documents stated the need to achieve strategic deterrence via overseas posturing of U.S. forces. However, none of them specified capabilities or composition required to achieve the desired ends aside from overseas positioning.

The joint force fulfills the strategic responsibility to provide deployed deterrent forces via a combination of permanently stationed and rotational units across each geographic CCMD. The Army retains permanently stationed units of all types to U.S. Northern Command and USEUCOM, as well as permanently stationed sustainment and enabler units across all geographic CCMDs. However, the Army provides the bulk of maneuver forces or combat arms units to U.S. Southern Command, USEUCOM (including Africa), USCENTCOM and USINDOPACOM via the RAF deployment concept. RAF missions include OAR in USEUCOM, OSS in USCENTCOM, and a rotation to the Korean Peninsula in support of the Eighth Army USINDOPACOM. Since the implementation of the RAF concept in 2013, the OAR, OSS and Korean deterrence rotations have been executed exclusively by ABCTs.

The Army's reliance on ABCTs to fulfill the responsibility of providing forward-postured deterrent forces appears to be based on the former Army force structure at the inception of the RAF concept in 2013. In other words, the limited amount of SBCTs at the time, combined with the lingering commitment of IBCTs to *Operations New Dawn* and *Enduring Freedom* in the sequestration environment of overall military drawdown, resulted in the incorporation of ABCTs into all three rotational missions, establishing an operational precedent. This precedent, combined with CCMD requests for heavy mechanized forces and Army efforts to justify the cost of armored troops within the Army force structure in a period of austerity, resulted in the exclusive use of ABCTs for Army rotational strategic deterrence that is still currently practiced. None of the contributing factors resulting from the Army's sole reliance on ABCTs for rotational deterrent deployment account for the formation of the SFABs in 2016. Changes in the strategic and operating environments over the last eight years, combined with recent SFAB operational performance, suggest that the SFAB is suitable for integration into the RAF concept in a way that precludes the Army from having to employ ABCTs exclusively for rotational strategic deterrence.

Current and Future ABCT Deployment

Since the RAF deployment model began in 2013, rotational ABCTs have deployed in their organic force structure of two combined-arms battalions, one cavalry squadron, one fires battalion, one Brigade Engineer Battalion (BEB), one brigade support battalion and the BCT headquarters. With the reduction in BCTs under sequestration in 2014, the ABCT force structure changed to add a third combined-arms battalion. In 2015, rotational ABCTs stopped using pre-positioned equipment in theater and instead deployed with all organic equipment from CONUS home stations and the guidance of then-U.S. Army Forces Command, Commanding

General Robert Abrams. ABCTs continue to deploy their entire force for RAF rotations except for 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry Regiment, 3d ABCT, 1st Cavalry Division in 2014 and 3d Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 3d ABCT, 1st Cavalry Division in 2015 to the Korea USINDO-PACOM rotation.

Increasing the amount of overseas rotational armored forces could cost as much as \$200 million annually in 2021 dollars for every additional ABCT deployed, or an increase upward of \$600 million annually to deploy an armored or mechanized division compared to a single ABCT. Inversely, cost reductions and savings project as approximately \$35 million annually in 2021 dollars per every battalion reduced from the current deployed force structure, or an estimated \$40 million for a combined-arms battalion task force, compared to an estimated \$200 million for an entire ABCT. By comparison, SFAB deployment and basing within similar parameters projects as approximately \$50 million to \$60 million for the whole brigade and exponentially less for a battalion task force or equivalent.

Beyond pure fiscal cost, allied political and military-strategic commentary across USEUCOM, USCENTCOM and USINDOPACOM tends to focus less on the size and specific capability of U.S. forces requested and more on partner interoperability. For example, NATO analysis of U.S. force posture in Europe centers more on U.S. interoperability with the Very High Readiness Task Force (VHRTF) in Eastern Europe than the specific need for a BCT, let alone an ABCT. Likewise, defense commentary among the Republic of Korea (RoK) and other Western Pacific allies revolves not only on interoperability vice-specific U.S. capabilities in light of increased RoK defense expenditures, but also on robust U.S. naval and air presence in the region, more so than a large U.S. army conventional footprint.

The focus on interoperability vice-specific capability creates opportunities for SFABs to leverage their doctrinal capabilities within the RAF model. There are some fringe concerns among allies such as Germany and Poland that reducing overall U.S. forward footprints will negatively impact host nation economies. Opportunities exist to reduce costs by employing a combination of SFAB and smaller conventional forces into the rotational deterrent concept.

Mitigating Negative Consequences

The negative impacts resulting from continual deployment are not unique to the armored force in terms of diminished equipment readiness from constant use. Wear and tear on organizational equipment and constrained maintenance and reset windows within perpetual deployment cycles impacted all BCTs as part of an Army primarily at war for the previous two decades. Likewise, the challenges posed to Soldier retention from fatigue resulting from this continual deployment and increased alternative employment options in an improving civilian economy over the last decade are not unique to ABCTs.

What separates and exacerbates the adverse effects on ABCTs since the scaling down of the global war on terror is the continuation of a perpetual deployment cycle as ABCTs execute RAF deterrence rotations. Simultaneously, the operational tempo for SBCTs and IBCTs decreased to that of the ABCTs. Furthermore, the Army experienced a functional shift from the BCT as the basic unit of action to divisions and corps in conducting large-scale combat operations as part of great-power competition. The constant deployment of three out of an available eleven ABCTs in the current active force structure at any given time constrains Army corps and divisions' ability to train their entire formation at home stations or CONUS locations to operate at full strength.

By integrating SFABs into the RAF deployment cycle and decreasing the amount of rotationally deployed conventional forces, the Army can create opportunities to increase readiness at the BCT level in areas such as maintenance and retention. Perhaps even more important for future operations, however, this course of action builds lethality in terms of proficiency in corps and division combined-arms maneuver and wide-area security competencies by retaining more ABCTs at home station for training. With the ongoing shift from the Sustained Readiness Model to the Aligned Readiness and Modernization Module (ReARMM) force generation model, integrating SFABs into the RAF deployment concept in a way that optimizes their unique capabilities decreases strain on the armored force and builds overall Army readiness.

Right-Sizing Force Structure

RAF deterrent deployments over the previous eight years do not necessarily suggest that a BCT is too large to achieve partner interoperability in maneuver capacity. However, mission requirements across OAR, OSS or USINDOPACOM Korea have not demanded BCT level maneuver as part of partnered operations. For example, ABCTs executing OAR have deployed smaller echelons from company team to battalion task force to train across Central and Eastern Europe with virtually all NATO partners, to include the VHRTF. However, the entire ABCT has yet to operate with a partnered force at one time. Likewise, ABCTs deployed in support of OSS in USCENTCOM have provided battalion task force and smaller units to partnered training operations such as *Operations Bright Star* in Egypt, *Eager Lion* in Jordan and *Desert Observer* in Kuwait. However, ABCTs deployed in support of OSS have yet to execute any partnered operations involving the entire BCT at any one time. ABCTs deployed to Korea conduct constant emergency deployment readiness exercises (EDREs) and combined-arms live-fire exercises with RoK and UN partners. They have yet to execute any of these missions with the entire BCT maneuvering or operating together at once.

While research suggests that entire ABCTs are not necessary for practical partnered interoperability training and operations, it also indicates that rotational ABCTs have not been incredibly effective in altering threat decision calculus as a deterrent either. For example, the presence of an ABCT postured in Poland and Germany in 2014 did not deter the Russian annexation of Crimea and the Donbas region of Ukraine, nor did it appreciably decrease Russian hybrid warfare activities in the Baltic States. Similarly, a rotational ABCT supporting OSS in USCENTCOM in 2014 had no noticeable impact on Islamic State of Iraq or Iranian operations in Iraq; Russian, Syrian, Iranian or Turkish operations in the Syrian Civil War; or Iranian operations in the Yemeni Civil War. In Korea, ABCTs are probably not the deciding factor in terms of means, especially considering the need for U.S. fires and naval and air forces in the region.

Furthermore, the Russian destruction of two Ukrainian mechanized brigades by massed fires alone in the opening phase of the Donbas invasion suggests that an ABCT is not even necessarily sufficient to delay a superior enemy force without significant augmentation, at least in USEUCOM. The improving massed fires and conventional capabilities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) present a very similar concern on the Korean Peninsula. Even with fires parity and other enabler support, a rotational ABCT would likely need significant conventional augmentation from host nation partners to survive and delay, let alone defeat, a superior attacking enemy force.

Given that evidence suggests entire rotational ABCTs are unnecessary for effective partner interoperability operations, opportunities exist to reduce the conventional overseas footprint

while compensating with SFAB integration. Furthermore, the debatable efficacy of ABCTs in achieving deterrence against peer threats without significant augmentation suggests that, aside from being unnecessarily large to achieve effective interoperability, rotational ABCTs may be too small to delay or defeat a superior attacking adversary effectively. Inversely, it may make rotational ABCTs more of an unnecessary target than a sufficiently early warning force. If a rotational ABCT needs augmentation to deter, delay effectively or even defeat a threat force, then the integration of SFABs is optimal to achieve a deterrent effect.

Current and Future SFAB Employment

After the inaugural deployments of 1st, 2d and 3d SFABs in their entirety to the USCENTCOM area of responsibility supporting *Operations Inherent Resolve* in Iraq and Kuwait and *Freedom's Sentinel/NATO Operation Resolute Support* in Afghanistan, SFAC has implemented an internal RAF deployment model: 1st SFAB aligns with SOUTHCOM, 2d SFAB aligns with USEUCOM (Africa), 3d SFAB with USCENTCOM, 4th SFAB with USEUCOM (Europe) and 5th SFAB with USINDOPACOM. Each SFAB rotates battalion task forces through deployment vice deploying the entire brigade at any one time. Each SFAB retains the ability to surge the whole brigade into its respective theater if needed.

Integrating SFABs into the current Army RAF strategic deterrent concept is feasible without changing their existing regional alignment within the SFAC concept. Potential impacts lie in whether SFAB battalion task forces are sufficient to offset the amount of conventional rotational forces reduced, if any. For example, advisor battalion task forces are likely sufficient if entire ABCTs remain a forward deterrent. If rotational ABCTs decrease to one battalion task force, multiple SFAB battalion task forces would be necessary to embed with the number of partnered forces necessary to leverage partner capability to compensate for the loss of U.S. conventional land capability. It is infeasible to surge the entire SFAB in perpetuity without permanently stationing them in their respective regions, a development that renders moot the concept of rotational deployment and lacks traction in a political environment seeking to reduce costs and overseas commitments.

Organizational, Materiel and Personnel Changes Impacts

Organizational impacts to reducing the amount of overseas rotational conventional forces include the loss of some combined-arms capability regarding how many combined-arms battalions or cavalry squadrons reduce if the Army chooses to deploy an echelon smaller than an ABCT. Reducing the deployed rotational force below BCT size means losing part of the BCT's fires battalion, depending on what organic fires assets the BCT places in support of the deployed combined-arms battalion task force(s) instead. However, the reduction in fires previously provided by the rotational BCT represents a minor loss of tactical capability. Thus, it is compensated by existing theater fires capabilities and is insufficient to produce a decisive tactical result against a numerically superior peer threat force anyway.

Reducing the deployed rotational force structure below BCT size likely means a reduction in organic tactical sustainment capability. The BCT likely will not deploy its entire Brigade Support Battalion (BSB) to support the combined-arms task force(s). As with the decrease in BCT fires battalion capability, however, theater sustainment infrastructure within each CCMD is entirely sufficient to compensate for the reduction. The reduction in some tactical sustainment capability by not deploying the entire BSB or BCT is not enough to create a tactical or operational disadvantage.

Suppose an entire BCT no longer deploys in support of an RAF rotation. Reduction in mobility, counter-mobility, survivability, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear reconnaissance capability is also possible. Likewise, some loss of intelligence analysis and signal support capability would likely result from a BCT not deploying its entire BEB. Also, BCTs would likely deploy part of their headquarters as a tactical command post. However, suppose only a single combined-arms battalion task force deploys in place of the entire BCT. The battalion's organic headquarters would almost certainly be sufficient to provide useful command and control. At any rate, the reduction of BEB and BCT headquarters capability represents a tactical adjustment at best. It creates no real disadvantage or impact at the operational, let alone strategic, level.

Organizational capabilities gained from incorporating SFABs into the RAF concept include the addition of at least nine combat advisor teams capable of providing AASLE to nine separate partner battalions, three company advisor teams providing AASLE to three partnered brigades and one battalion advisor team providing AASLE to one partnered division by building an advisor battalion task force around one or more of its infantry advisor battalions or the cavalry squadron. This capability doubles or triples depending on how many advisor battalion task forces an SFAB provides in theater at any one time. A rotational advisor battalion task force could provide AASLE to a partnered fires battalion via a field artillery advising team, but also other units depending on if the SFAB placed a battery advising team capable of advising a partner fires brigade.

An SFAB battalion task force could also provide AASLE to a partnered engineer battalion via an engineer advising team and AASLE to a partnered engineer brigade with an engineer company advising team. It could even provide AASLE to partnered division and above engineer assets if the SFAB placed elements of its BEB advising team supporting the deployed advisor battalion task force. An SFAB BSB possesses the ability to provide AASLE to a partner sustainment battalion via a logistics advisor team, partner sustainment brigade via a logistics company advisor team or partner sustainment command at division and higher via elements of the BSB advisor team. Logistics advisor teams in support of advisor battalion task forces are combat multipliers enhancing partnered sustainment capabilities in a way that compensates for the reduction of a rotational BCT's BSB.

Like rotational BCTs deploying only part of their force, SFABs could elect to deploy part of the brigade headquarters to provide command and control for the advisor battalion task forces. A significant advantage to deploying elements of the SFAB brigade headquarters is that advisors from the brigade staff can provide AASLE to partnered corps and above formations. This ability exponentially increases the efficiency of multinational interoperability in a theater. Ultimately, SFAB task forces would not compensate for the loss of conventional tactical maneuver capability from reducing rotational BCTs in a theater. However, as with the BSB and brigade headquarters advising capabilities, the prospective three- to ninefold increase in partner conventional ability possible through the integration of advisor battalion task forces into the RAF rotation represents an exponential increase in overall combat power available to a CCMD in a way that a single traditional BCT cannot equal. Evidence analyzed in this study does not suggest a need for any permanent organizational changes to existing BCT or SFAB structures, regardless of rotational BCT reduction or SFAB integration in a theater.

Materiel impacts from reducing conventional forces in theater focus on a reduced need for basing, due to significantly less equipment, depending on the number of conventional troops

decreased in a theater. Reducing the number of mechanized forces in theater and that SFABs possess leads to a drastically smaller vehicle footprint, which translates primarily into a lower need for motor pool and mounted maneuver space compared to the temporary, host nation military or leased bases that rotational ABCTs generally occupy. These impacts to installation management are negligible. The only exception is perhaps Korea, where rotational forces generally occupy permanent installations, even if leased from the RoK government. Reducing conventional forces and integrating SFAB elements also represent a decreased need in maintenance facilities and support correspondingly.

Other materiel impacts manifest in reduced costs for strategic deployment to theater from CONUS locations and operational deployment within a theater. The cost of deploying fewer conventional forces reduces in increments of approximately \$20 million in 2021 dollars for every battalion of a BCT not deployed compared to roughly \$10 million for every SFAB battalion task force deployed. For example, reducing conventional rotational forces from a BCT to a combined-arms battalion task force represents a savings of approximately \$80 million. Deploying an SFAB advisor battalion task force in place of the rest of the BCT would cost roughly \$12 million for a \$68 million net savings, depending on its composition.

Reduction in conventional forces in favor of SFAB integration overseas also represents an overall decreased consumption rate across all classes of supply. For example, an ABCT of approximately 4,500 Soldiers reduced to a battalion task force of roughly 700 represents a decrease of 3,800 Soldiers in theater. Offset against about 300 Soldiers in the advisor battalion task force replacing the difference in combat power from the reduced BCTs, it results in approximately 3,500 fewer Soldiers sustaining in a theater. Thus, the net impacts of reducing conventional forces and integrating SFAB forces into the deterrence rotation appreciably decrease demand on theater sustainment capabilities. Like organizational impacts, the evidence does not suggest that permanent materiel changes are needed to equip and sustain either formation, whether conventional force levels change or SFABs are integrated into the RAF rotation.

As with materiel impacts, the personnel decrease resulting from reducing conventional deployed rotational forces and integrating SFAB units affects basing via diminished requirements. This impact is genuine, given that many, if not most, advisor teams would embed with their partner force in a way that likely further reduces the need for U.S. basing in a theater. As with organizational impacts, the reduction of conventional forces decreases capability to conduct combined-arms maneuver and wide-area security resulting from the decrease in infantrymen, armor crewmen, scouts, etc. in a way that SFABs cannot compensate in and of themselves. However, SFABs do not need augmentation to replace the capabilities lost from reducing conventional forces as they leverage those capabilities from partners instead. The only personnel augmentation an SFAB task force needs is a designated security force consisting of approximately one maneuver company per battalion task force equivalent. Even then, a security force is only necessary based on partner forces' reliability and the security environment. For example, SFAB advisors in USEUCOM or USINDOPACOM Korea likely would not need a designated security force as often as advisor forces in USCENTCOM. While security force augmentation is necessary for SFAB integration into the RAF concept on a mission-dependent basis, the requirement does not demand permanent personnel changes in either conventional rotational forces or SFABs. Security forces could even be sourced from deployed rotational conventional battalion task forces, or permanent maneuver forces, in the case of USEUCOM, in a theater.

Comparative SFAB Efficiency

The expeditionary capabilities of an SFAB BSB partnered with host nation sustainment assets create opportunities to rapidly open a theater of operations in advance of more sophisticated sustainment assets. This capability further allows for the subsequent rapid deployment of conventional forces. The nature of current RAF rotational deployments consists of generally established, mature theaters of operation. Historically, rotational ABCTs have not conducted theater opening or setting.

However, the capability offered by the BSB element within an SFAB task force allows for a rapid increase of conventional forces in a theater via EDRE, such as Reforger or Defender Europe 2020. Theoretically, the capability reduces the need for conventional troops forward in a theater on a rotational or permanent basis. The SFABs' ability to set a theater for subsequent conventional forces creates an opportunity to maintain enough conventional capability forward in a theater to provide reaction time, maneuver space and deterrence while reducing risk. Reducing conventional forces postured permanently or rotationally in theater also eliminates basing costs by \$20 million to \$80 million per conventional battalion while retaining only deployment costs of approximately \$100 million per conventional brigade in the event of a surge or EDRE.

Fulfilling Strategic Needs while Reducing Operational Demands

Research and analysis show that the need for conventional overseas forces for deterrence and early warning will persist into the foreseeable future because of specific guidance mandated in U.S. strategic documents from the national strategy to theater strategic level, particularly in USEUCOM, USCENTCOM and USINDOPACOM. It is also the case due to the nature of threats present in each respective theater. If peer competitors possess significant conventional capabilities, U.S. conventional forces in a theater will be necessary to change the decision calculus of threat actors to deter aggression, or, if critical, delay or defeat threat forces and protect U.S. interests and allies.

When the Army developed the RAF concept in 2013 to fulfill its role in strategic deterrence within CCMDs, force structure, sequestration and the demands of combatant commanders shaped the strategic environment in ways that required the Army to execute all RAF rotational deployments using ABCTs exclusively. In 2016, however, the formation of the SFABs created a new capability, enabling the Army to leverage conventional partner capabilities and reducing demand for U.S. conventional forces deployed in each theater. SFABs can now fulfill part of the role previously filled by ABCTs within the RAF rotation by integrating with multinational partners in a way that reduces costs while providing the United States with flexible deterrent options and preserving combined-arms maneuver capability.

Conclusion

Based on the assessed capabilities of SFABs, this study recommends reducing the number of conventional forces deployed in the RAF concept by reducing the deployed ABCT from three combined-arms battalions to two. The difference will be compensated by an SFAB battalion task force executing a synchronized and concurrent regionally aligned deployment within the SFAC regional alignment model as a test of concept. Measures of effectiveness and performance should be expressed in terms of interoperability and maintaining deterrent effect against threats as assessed by USEUCOM, USCENTCOM and USINDOPACOM strategic estimates.

If successful, the Army should expand the test of concept to reduce the deployed conventional force to one combined-arms battalion task force provided from a supporting CONUS-based ABCT with SFAC, continuing to rotate advisor battalion task forces in its current model. The recommended force structure for rotational strategic deterrence deployments is one combined-arms battalion task force and one SFAB battalion task force. However, if this mix of forces proves insufficient, this study suggests a ratio of either two combined-arms battalion task forces and one SFAB battalion task force, or one combined-arms task force and two SFAB battalion task forces, dependent on the operational environment and force availability. This revised approach will help to relieve stresses on force generation and readiness and will provide fiscal, materiel and personnel savings.

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