



Strategic Readiness: The U.S. Army as a Global Force

*Army forces must be **expeditionary**—[able] to deploy task-organized forces on short notice to austere locations [and] capable of conducting operations immediately upon arrival. . . . Army forces must be **agile**—[able to] transition across the range of military operations and domains in a coordinated effort to gain positions of relative advantage.*

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Introduction

The United States Army is a global force—nearly 190,000 Soldiers on active duty in 140 countries. Notably, there are minimal forces forward stationed—only two brigade combat teams (BCTs) stationed in Italy and Germany. For the Army to provide trained and ready forces to the combatant commanders (COCOMs) in a timely and responsive manner, Soldiers and their leaders must have an expeditionary mindset, as the luxury of time is not in their favor. Today's complex and unpredictable security environment makes it impossible to anticipate when and where the nation will make requirements of its Army. Now, as never before, the ability to deploy from the United States and employ into a theater is at the essence of a relevant Army. The joint force must have expeditionary, campaign-quality strategic landpower to ensure the protection of the vital interests of the United States.

Background

In 1990–1991, the deployment to the Middle East for Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm revealed several shortfalls in America's ability to rapidly project power. To overcome these capability gaps, the nation invested nearly \$50 billion to improve its strategic responsiveness. Enhanced infrastructure coupled with emergency deployment readiness exercises (EDREs) and companion sea deployment readiness exercises (SEDREs) enabled the Army to deploy rapidly in response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. homeland (9/11).

These endeavors exercised the Army and other elements of the joint force in the conduct of rail, air and port operations. However, the enduring nature of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq forced the U.S. military to focus its efforts on these two theaters at the expense of training for rapid contingency operations. Moreover, a force-generation cycle that deployed units through a series of intermediate staging bases replaced a rapid-deployment mindset. In addition, forces bound for Iraq and Afghanistan often relied on taking possession of equipment (particularly large ground vehicles) already present in theater instead of deploying from home station with their own organic heavy vehicles and equipment. This procedure made sense for the purpose of easing logistical expenses, but it came at a cost to those units' overall readiness.²

Deploying from home station through an airfield or port as part of a contingency operation requires the capacity and capabilities of all components—a Total Army effort. Many of the enablers necessary to conduct rail, flight and port operations exist in the reserve component, especially the Army Reserve. To reconstitute the expeditionary mindset and capabilities resident in the force of the 1990s, the Army has initiated Total Army EDREs and SEDREs as a core competency to ensure it is strategically ready and responsive. In April 2016, the Port of Jacksonville (JAXPORT), Florida, supported the first SEDRE in several years. The 3d BCT of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the 832d Transportation Battalion and several other supporting civilian and military organizations took the lead in rebuilding the Army's capability and capacity to rapidly deploy worldwide.



Building an Expeditionary Capability

To understand the factors that influence the ability to rapidly project land forces to the point of need, it is necessary to analyze the numerous steps that constitute any unit's deployment in response to a contingency. For an Army unit—regardless of its size—the deployment process usually comprises:

- training for deployment and ensuring that Soldiers (and their families) are ready;
- preparing for planned requirements in support of a known mission while also preparing for the possibility that an unknown requirement could arise;
- organizing, loading and staging equipment and vehicles;
- preparing hazardous materials for shipment;
- packing containers and building pallets of supplies;
- arranging convoys and loading railcars and commercial trucks to move equipment to seaports of embarkation and then onto ships;
- loading personnel and accompanying equipment onto aircraft timed to meet ships as they arrive in theater;
- journeying from ports of embarkation to ports of debarkation;
- unloading, organizing, staging and moving forward to the final destination; and
- maintaining visibility and accountability of equipment and personnel throughout the process.³

In this SEDRE, the 3d BCT deployed from Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to conduct a rotation at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, Louisiana. The unit did not conduct the movement as in previous years. This time, the 3d BCT loaded their equipment onto rail cars at Fort Campbell, railed the equipment to JAXPORT and transferred it onto a ship. The ship sailed to Port Arthur, Texas, where the unit offloaded and moved their vehicles and equipment by vehicular convoy to the JRTC.

During the deployment to Fort Polk, the BCT's leadership experienced the challenges associated with moving nearly 1,000 pieces of equipment by train from Fort Campbell to JAXPORT; by ship to Port Arthur; and by road to Fort Polk. The equipment included approximately 700 vehicles and trailers and several containers and packages. Moving the BCT's equipment required Soldiers and support from 14 locations across six different states and use of the United States Naval Ship (USNS) *Benavidez*, a large, medium-speed roll-on/roll-off vessel from the Navy's Sealift Command.

The 832d Transportation Battalion provided the expertise and leadership to coordinate the movement of the BCT's equipment at JAXPORT. Their purpose was "to deploy U.S. Army combat forces at a sea port of embarkation to regain

lost deployment proficiencies and to develop lessons learned for future SEDREs."⁴ This phase of the SEDRE required Soldiers to offload four trains and then load and secure each piece of equipment on the USNS *Benavidez*. It required the coordinated efforts of Soldiers, seamen and civilians from the JAXPORT local authorities, the U.S. Maritime Administration, Military Sealift Command, the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Transportation Command, U.S. Forces Command, the XVIII Airborne Corps, the Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, the Deployment Support Command, 3d Expeditionary Sustainment Command and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault).

Each participating entity played a vital role in the successful execution of the SEDRE, which had not been conducted in JAXPORT since 2001. This and future SEDREs require Total Army, joint force and combined military and civilian efforts to rapidly deploy units from home station to ports worldwide. The JAXPORT SEDRE is part of a larger Army effort to conduct Joint Expeditionary Maneuver and Entry Operations—Army Warfighting Challenge number 12—that enable forces to quickly deploy to a theater and transition to combat operations.⁵ Rebuilding this capability to ensure the Army is ready and available is possible only with dependable resourcing and funding.

The Way Ahead

Threats to the United States remain worldwide, unpredictable and numerous. The current U.S.-based footprint of Army forces demands, within the Total Army, an expeditionary mindset and the capacity and capability to rapidly execute contingency operations. Key to that success are well-trained and well-led units together with well-rehearsed mobility enablers who are highly competent in rail, air and port operations. Should Army forces be unable to meet COCOM requirements and timelines, the protection of U.S. vital interests will be at risk.

The JAXPORT SEDRE is the first in an ongoing initiative to rebuild Army strategic readiness. Capturing lessons learned from this exercise and disseminating them to participants in upcoming exercises are critical to the Army's future readiness; the rapidly evolving and volatile national security environment dictates a high-priority effort to ensure Army strategic readiness.

Timely and predictable funding is essential for these types of exercises to succeed, especially since they require civilian infrastructure and support as well as capabilities from throughout the joint force. To ensure that the Army can get to crises in time to protect the nation's interests and to minimize loss of life and human suffering, the Total Army—Regular Army, Army National Guard and Army Reserve—is committed to developing the capabilities not only to conduct the full range of military operations once in theater but also to rapidly project forces from the United States to the point of need.

Key Points

- The Army is rebuilding its expeditionary capabilities through Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercises (EDREs) and Sea Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercises (SEDREs).
- The SEDRE conducted by 3d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and the 832d Transportation Battalion at the Port of Jacksonville, Florida, was the first conducted at that port since 2001. The lessons learned will benefit future EDREs and SEDREs for exercises and deployments to crises worldwide.
- To regain this expeditionary capability the Army requires adequate and predictable funding and a focused Total Army investment.
- Due to the multiplicity and complexity of state and non-state threats in today's globalized environment, an expeditionary Army is essential to U.S. security and the protection of the nation's interests.

Endnotes

- ¹ "Harbingers of War: Implications for the Army with Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 4 May 2016, <https://www.csis.org/events/harbingers-future-war-implications-army-lieutenant-general-hr-mcmaster>.
- ² AUSA's Torchbearer National Security Report "Strategic Mobility: Enabling Global Responsiveness for America's Force of Decisive Action" (July 2013), p. 6, <http://www.ausa.org/publications/ilw/DigitalPublications/Documents/tb-strategic-mobility/index.html>.
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.
- ⁴ "Turbo Activation/Distribution SEDRE at JAXPORT, 4–27 April 2016," 832d Transportation Battalion Concept Brief.
- ⁵ U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army Operating Concept: 2020–2040*, 31 October 2014, p. 31, <http://www.tradoc.army.mil/tpubs/pams/tp525-3-1.pdf>.



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