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Army Adaptation from 1898 to the Present: How Army Leaders Balanced Strategic and Institutional Imperatives to Best Serve the Nation

Robert H. Simpson
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ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY

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LAND WARFARE PAPER NO. 98, September 2013

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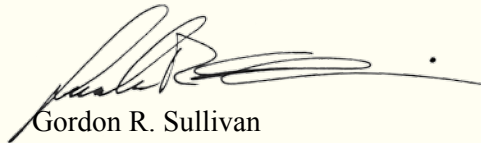
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Foreword

Historically, American civilian and military leaders have filled two main roles for the Army. They have served as military advisors for improving warfighting strategies and they have worked in an institutional role, providing for the organization, training and equipping of Soldiers. The authors argue that the leaders who have focused on internal improvement of the Army have had a more positive effect than did the leaders who, during periods of drawdown, attempted to improve Army resourcing by influencing strategic policy.

Bearing in mind the current increasingly tighter fiscal environment—an environment that, for the military, has always accompanied a drawdown period—the authors propose a number of measures that senior Army leaders might employ to ensure the sustainability of the various resources necessary for the continued strength, success and internal institutional improvement of the Army. They provide strategic lessons supporting their position by examining the circumstances of key conflicts that America has seen from the time of the Spanish–American War to the start of the new millennium.



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Army Adaptation from 1898 to the Present: How Army Leaders Balanced Strategic and Institutional Imperatives to Best Serve the Nation

Introduction

The Army's civilian and military senior leaders traditionally have two distinct roles: a strategic role as key military advisors in the development of national and warfighting strategy—including resourcing—and an institutional role as designers, organizers, trainers and equippers of the Army. The most successful leaders have generally weighted efforts to the institutional role while metering efforts to change strategies and budgets. We will show that leaders who focused on leading the internal change required in the Army were more successful not only at mitigating the effects of directed strategic change but also at alleviating the inevitable gaps created between strategy and resources that have occurred in every drawdown period since the end of the Spanish–American War in 1898. On the other hand, we will demonstrate that the most energetic attempts to influence strategic policy and resourcing of the Army during a down period had only marginal success and caused the Army to get its initial dispositions wrong for the first battle of the next war.

Army leaders must prepare for two categories of change. The first is externally directed change in national strategy, policy, law, regulations and budgets that emanates from the President, the Secretary of Defense or Congress. The second category is internal change made in response to evolving threats, technology or changes to environmental variables, such as political, military, economic and social information; infrastructure; physical environment; and time. A historical review of Army adaptation follows that describes the major periods of change and identifies the strategic directed and internal institutional lessons from each period. This review demonstrates that successful Army leaders use strategic debates to gain leverage that enables the right institutional changes. Finally, *those leaders who focus on winning strategic debates ultimately have little strategic influence and are left with less influence for negotiating institutional changes.*

Historical Review of Army Adaptation

Public and political support for the military usually increases when a threat appears and then decreases after the threat is diminished or removed. This trend plays out in “guns or butter” debates, which often frame political deliberations. Congress can buy guns (invest in

defense/military), buy butter (invest in social programs and production of goods and services) or invest in a combination of both. Following conflict, butter ascends and guns decline. This trend in budget cycles has occurred after nearly every major conflict since the Revolutionary War, including the Civil War, the Spanish–American War, World War I, World War II, the Vietnam War, the end of the Cold War and now the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. In every case, Army leaders have had to strike a proper balance to successfully accomplish both their roles. There are six previous periods that required significant Army change, each of which provides strategic and institutional lessons.

The Spanish–American War Period, 1898–1910¹

Until the late 19th century Americans had focused primarily on settling the North American continent. Traditionally, Americans were wary of a large standing military and believed that citizen-Soldiers should be sufficient to respond to any attack against the nation. As a result, the U.S. Army remained a small force sufficient to fight Indians. By 1898, however, the United States was ready to expand its horizons, which would result in new Army missions. America's expansion along its western frontier was drawing to a close and Americans had become more supportive of developing American interests overseas, especially in the Pacific and Caribbean. When Cuba rebelled against Spain, many Americans expressed sympathy for their cause. Both President Grover Cleveland and his successor, President William McKinley, were determined to remain neutral; however, a series of events, including the sinking of the USS *Maine*, eventually led to a congressional declaration of war.

Although the main conflict was centered on Cuban independence, the ten-week war was fought in both the Caribbean and the Pacific as the United States challenged Spanish control over its territories in both regions. The causes of the Spanish–American War are less important to this discussion than the aftermath, which produced changes that required significant Army adaptation. After Spain sued for peace, and following several months of negotiations, the Treaty of Paris was signed on 10 December 1898 and was ratified by the U.S. Senate on 6 February 1899.² The Treaty of Paris allowed temporary U.S. control of Cuba and ceded permanent colonial authority over Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines, thus establishing U.S. territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

This new, more aggressive U.S. foreign policy was unsecured by a national security strategy. For example, the Army was unprepared for the Spanish–American War, having suffered from years of neglect. Its numbers averaged about 26,000 over the previous two decades.³ Those forces were scattered across the nation and received spotty training depending on their locations, leadership and resources. It was a force largely designed for and accustomed to fighting Indians in the West.

Few Army leaders were thinking about the Army's future role and, because of the diffusion of power through the Department of War's bureau structure, it is unlikely they would have made any changes even if they had envisioned a future. Authority in the Department of War was divided among the Secretary of War, the Commanding General of the Army and the heads of the staff bureaus (such as the ordnance and quartermaster departments). The commanding general was responsible for training, discipline and military control of armies in the field but had no authority over the bureaus and was often at odds with the Secretary of War. For example, the Commanding General of the Army, Major General Nelson Miles, proposed a deliberate plan to assemble, train and equip a small force of about 80,000 using the Regular Army

as a nucleus while waiting for the end of the rainy season before invading Cuba. The Secretary of War, Russell Alger, ignored his plans and ordered infantry regiments to depart immediately. This rushed departure caused many problems, including leaving the cavalry's horses behind.

The War Department was so ineffective it is amazing that Army forces performed as well as they did. Fortunately, the Regular Army, comprised of veterans from the Indian wars and the volunteer militias (such as the Rough Riders), brought skilled cowboys, hunters, Native Americans and college students, all able-bodied and capable on horseback and in shooting. Suffering several defeats, the Spanish sued for peace. After approving the Treaty of Paris, the United States gained possession of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines. Many Filipinos preferred self-rule and in 1899 rebelled against American governance; thus began the Philippine–American War, which lasted two years. During this same period, the United States supported an international effort to rescue Western diplomats in Peking, China, during the Boxer rebellion. U.S. participation in the China Relief Expedition and the continued presence of Army forces in China became examples of America's changing role in world affairs.

It was clear that America's growing economic and political interests abroad would need to be defended not only by the Navy but also with Army forces. Because of problems suffered during the war, and because of the nation's growing interests overseas, there was increased public and political support for expanding and modernizing the Army. The public furor over the conduct of the war prompted President McKinley to appoint the Dodge Commission to investigate. Two outcomes of the Dodge Commission's findings were the resignation of Secretary Alger and a President committed to reforms. It was clear that the Army had been unprepared for the nation's latest conflicts and that it now had a new and expanded mission to defend U.S. territories and interests abroad. ***This period was one of the few instances when the American people supported a peacetime expansion; the other was the Cold War, thus demonstrating the growing international view of the American people.***

Strategic Lessons⁴

The Spanish–American War marked America's emergence as a young global power. Concerned over the shortcomings demonstrated during the war, President McKinley appointed Elihu Root as Secretary of War in 1899. Secretary Root led fundamental reforms in Army organization, administration and training. He convinced Congress to authorize a Chief of Staff of the Army, assisted by a General Staff, to help administer the War Department. He reformed the Army's education system by creating a War College and a General Staff College. He also directed that officers train at the West Point Military Academy and at five service schools specializing in artillery; engineer applications; submarine defense; cavalry and field artillery; and medical expertise. In response to concerns about mobilizing and deploying state militia forces, Secretary Root supported the Militia Act of 1903, which established the National Guard as a federally funded reserve component. The act also provided federal funding to pay for additional training. ***Major reform and increased support for the Army resulted from a major shift in foreign policy and a demonstrated weakness on the part of the Army to support that policy.***

Institutional Lessons⁵

To support Secretary Root's reforms, the Army bureaus conducted extensive tests, convening boards to study the latest in weapons, transport and equipment. Based on recommendations, the Secretary convinced Congress to fund some Army modernization. As a result, the Army equipped its forces with Springfield rifles, the .45-caliber Colt automatic pistol, modern

machine guns and new artillery. The most important modernization of this period was the internal combustion engine, which led to a revolution in military transportation based on trucks, armored transports, tanks and airplanes. *While it would be some time before generals took full advantage of the new Army Chief of Staff position, they were now able to lead integrated institutional change and the power of the bureaus was reduced.*

The Interwar Period, 1917–1945⁶

Initially, the United States was committed to a policy of nonintervention during the “European War,” but after German U-boats sank several U.S. merchant ships and Germany encouraged Mexico to invade, U.S. public opinion changed. On 6 April 1917, Congress voted to declare war on Germany and quickly authorized the formation of a National Army consisting of conscripts and volunteer forces. At its greatest strength, the National Army fielded 6,000,000 men. After World War I, the National Army disbanded and the Regular Army was reduced to about 150,000 men, a 97.5 percent reduction. The prevailing congressional and public attitude was that future conflicts would be resolved diplomatically.⁷ President Wilson invested himself in the development of the League of Nations, expecting that it would prevent future wars. Many Americans supported his efforts, although others leaned towards isolationism. In response to these attitudes, Congress approved the Washington Naval Treaty in 1922 (to prevent a naval arms race) and the 1929 Kellogg–Briand Pact, which renounced the use of war, called for the peaceful settlement of disputes and limited the military to defensive planning only.

The Army continued to experience reductions in manpower and declining budgets. Senior Army leaders, including most of the Secretaries of War and Army Chiefs of Staff, were keenly aware the Army was in decline and warned Congress continually of the state of affairs. In three consecutive annual reports, the first in 1921, Secretary of War John W. Weeks warned,

[O]ur present combat strength will be insufficient to fulfill the functions required by our national defense policy. . . . [A]dditional cuts would endanger our safety. . . . [F]actors which introduce causes for war are now in the making; it is the height of folly to continue the present policy of cutting our financial support of the War Department. . . . We are already cut below our vital needs.

Similar complaints of unpreparedness were extracted from Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis’s annual reports (1925–28) and those of his successors of that period. Warnings also came from reports and speeches by General John J. Pershing and every succeeding Chief of Staff. These warnings had little effect on successive administrations committed to peace and prosperity, or on Congressmen who sincerely believed that future war could be prevented. In 1929, President Herbert Hoover expressed concerns about the Army and ordered Secretary of War James W. Good to examine the War Department’s needs and to “reconsider our whole Army program.” Unfortunately, the stock market collapsed before the report was completed, dooming any possible program for increasing Army expenditures.

In the 1930s the clouds of war began to form. Japan seized Manchuria despite diplomatic efforts by the League of Nations. Adolf Hitler came to power, renounced the Treaty of Versailles and began rearming Germany. Italy’s Benito Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, while Spain experienced a revolution followed by a civil war. Congress responded to these events by passing a series of neutrality acts. In this emerging environment, warnings from the Secretaries of War and the Army Chiefs of Staff began to have more weight. Eventually, Congress authorized a small increase in the size of the Army and an increase in expenditures for equipment. By 1938,

President Franklin D. Roosevelt had begun to express his growing concern over the activities of the Rome–Berlin–Tokyo axis and informed Congress that U.S. national defense was inadequate.

The Army experienced a period of great decline and neglect during the interwar years despite the efforts of the Secretaries of War and Army Chiefs of Staff. Any who would blame them for not doing more must concede that the nation had the Army it wanted. During the interwar period the nation's defense policy matched its foreign policy. While some Americans were pragmatists and anticipated future wars, the majority still believed that diplomacy would prevent future wars and if that failed the Navy would be sufficient defense.

Strategic Lessons⁸

While there was little support for modernizing or expanding the Army after World War I, Congress did pass some important legislation. After considerable debate among Army leaders over how to design an expansible army, Chief of Staff General Peyton March submitted a plan to Congress. His plan was not well received because it called for a standing Army of 500,000. Congress knew the public would not support a large standing Army, but after months of debate it passed the National Defense Act on 4 June 1920. The act established the Army of the United States as an organization of three components: the standing Regular Army, the National Guard and the Organized Reserves. Each of the three Army components was to be so regulated in peacetime that it could contribute its appropriate share of troops in a war emergency. The act established a standing Army of 296,000 men. Designed to be too small to fight a large-scale war, it would have to rely on citizen-Soldiers from the National Guard and Reserve for large-scale mobilizations. The Regular Army was assigned the responsibility for training its reserve components; a small increase in the number of Regular Army officers was authorized to support this new mission. At the urging of General March, the act also authorized the addition of three new Army branches: Air Service, Chemical Warfare and the Finance Department. These changes demonstrated that, shortly after World War I, Army leaders influenced organizational changes that Congress directed for the military, but they had significantly less influence over the endstrength. Over the next decades, the Army continued to decline and the Secretaries of War and Army Chiefs of Staff continued to advise and warn Congress, with little success, that the Army was unprepared for war. ***Senior Army leaders were unable to gain congressional support for the Army until war was upon us.***

Institutional Lessons⁹

Throughout the interwar period, senior Army leaders warned Congress and administrations that the Army was too small and underfunded, but with little effect. Because of the abundance of weapons and equipment left over from World War I, there was almost no funding for new equipment.¹⁰ The Army focused its limited resources on maintaining personnel strength and improving its doctrine and training. Army arsenals and laboratories studied weapon and equipment improvements based on new technology in the 1920s and 1930s but were inadequately funded to accomplish major change. In addition, the Army mismanaged several opportunities for modernization. Secretary of War Dwight Davis asked Chief of Staff General Charles Summerall to conduct experiments on mechanized forces. The result was a prototype of American armored forces that was approved by both men. Unfortunately, before it could be implemented, General Douglas MacArthur, the new Chief of Staff, ordered a restudy of mechanized forces, slowing down the development of combined-arms armored forces. Another opportunity mismanaged was the development of airpower. The arguments over the tactical and strategic possibilities of the airplane were so contentious that they led to Colonel Billy Mitchell's court-martial and

seriously slowed the development of airpower. Overall, Army leaders focused on maintaining the force that existed; although they supported modernization, they lacked the funding to institute major change. This period highlights the cultural conservatism of the Army with regard to the potential of new technology and the importance of senior leadership influence in driving Army change—a change that must occur from the top down.

Army leaders did some things well. One of the Army's major missions during this period was to train the National Guard and the Reserve, requiring a higher ratio of Regular Army officers and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as training cadre. The Army assigned its best to this mission, as indicated by Colonel George C. Marshall serving as a National Guard advisor. In 1933, Congress passed legislation resulting in the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), designed to provide work for the large numbers of jobless men. President Roosevelt, disregarding MacArthur's opposition, directed the War Department to administer the program. The result required bringing thousands of reserve officers and NCOs on active duty to manage the program. While the President's guidance did not mention using the CCC as a covert military program, the CCC nonetheless produced more than three million men managed and disciplined by the Army; they provided additional training and experience for thousands of reserve Soldiers. The Army benefited from these missions because they produced large numbers of officers and NCOs with training experience. Two major lessons from this period are:

- When resources are limited and the mission is uncertain, Army leaders should focus on maintaining the best Army possible and prepare for change so that when resources become available again the Army will know what needs to be done.
- Army leaders have little influence over external directed change when an administration, Congress and the public are all committed to different goals. It is only when the threat becomes clear and significant to the public that civilian leaders become amenable to the warnings of Army leaders.

A Too Brief Respite: Post-World War II, 1945–1950¹¹

During World War II, Congress established the Army of the United States by combining Regular Army, National Guard, Reserve and conscript forces into one fighting unit. Over the course of the war, the department mobilized, trained and deployed more than 8,000,000 men. By war's end, the United States had emerged as a major world power, possessing one of the best trained, most experienced and best armed ground forces in the world. The entire nation, military and civilian, sacrificed much to achieve victory in World War II. Nevertheless, when the war ended, the nation was once again ready to demobilize its Army and turn its attention back to the economy as described in the guns-or-butter debate.

The destruction of Europe left America as the sole Western power and the only counterweight to communist ambitions. U.S. policy shifted to focusing on economic growth, rebuilding our allies and former enemies and combating communist beliefs, primarily in the Soviet Union. The Army's priorities became disbanding its enormous wartime army, providing constabulary forces over former enemies and determining how to organize and fight on an atomic battlefield. These priorities complemented defense policy as the United States shifted to a reliance on nuclear weapons to serve as the primary deterrent to Soviet military action. Policymakers hoped that nuclear weapons would provide an economic alternative to a large standing army. As a result, the Army declined in strength to 591,000 Soldiers, ten weak divisions and five regimental combat teams. The combination of the Army's rapid drawdown and a defense policy

that relied primarily on nuclear weapons contributed to the Army's lack of preparation during the first months of the Korean War.

Strategic Lessons¹²

During World War II, the War Department assumed great responsibility and authority to manage the war effort. The Joint Chiefs of Staffs construct was developed during the war and continued to function afterwards. Congress debated changes to the War and Navy departments and attempted to decentralize authorities along with other organizational changes in the National Security Act of 1947. The National Security Act merged the Department of War and the Department of the Navy into the National Military Establishment, headed by the Secretary of Defense. The Department of War and the Secretary of War became the Department of the Army and the Secretary of the Army and most of their subordinate organizations became part of the Department of the Army. The act also created the Department of the Air Force. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, composed of the military chiefs of the three services, was established to serve as the primary military advisors to the President, the National Security Council and the Secretary of Defense. The Joint Chiefs established Unified Commands for combat forces. Initially, each of the three service secretaries maintained cabinet status, but the act was amended on 10 August 1949 to ensure subordination to the Secretary of Defense. The amendment also changed the organization's title from the National Military Establishment to the Department of Defense.

As the Army drew down in size, General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff and General of the Army, supported the citizen-Soldier plan proposed by Major General John M. Palmer, which eventually became the Marshall-Palmer proposal for universal military training.¹³ The plan's central argument was that modern war would not allow the time to recruit and train adequate forces in an emergency. This could be remedied by ensuring that all men received basic military training. President Harry Truman endorsed the proposal during a joint session of Congress on 23 October 1945. However, the act was diluted in congressional committees that passed the Universal Military Training and Service Act in 1951 but supported only the "principle" of universal military training; thus, universal service was never actually implemented. ***Even an Army leader with the stature of General Marshall and with the support of the President still had limited influence with Congress. The public did not support the plan and some even compared it to a "Nazi-like program."***

Institutional Lessons¹⁴

When General Dwight D. Eisenhower became the Army Chief of Staff, he reorganized the headquarters under a general staff with five divisions: Personnel and Administration; Intelligence; Organization and Training; Service, Supply and Procurement; and Plans and Operations. Below the Chief of Staff, the Chief of Army Field Forces was directly responsible for developing tactical doctrine, for controlling the Army school system and for supervising the field training of Army units. He exercised these responsibilities through the headquarters of the six Continental Army Areas into which the United States was divided. Infantry, armor and artillery were all added as combat-arms organizations. All tactical divisions were reorganized based on experience from World War II. For example, each infantry division received a tank battalion and an antiaircraft battalion. In 1948, Chief of Staff General Omar Bradley proposed another plan to expand and modernize the Army but was unable to gain the support of the Secretary of Defense or Congress. ***A succession of popular, publicly known Chiefs of Staff were unable to persuade the policymakers to expand or fund the Army at the level requested.*** As a result, Army divisions were soon understrength and short on authorized equipment.

Post-Korean War Period, 1953–1965¹⁵

On 25 June 1950, the army of the Republic of Korea and the North Korean army forces exchanged fire. This action escalated to a complete North Korean army invasion along the 38th parallel. Strategic miscalculation abetted by American policy statements had led the North Koreans to believe that the United States would not intervene on behalf of South Korea. They were wrong. The United Nations Security Council unanimously condemned the North Korean invasion of the Republic of Korea and, on 27 June 1950, recommended that member nations provide military assistance. President Truman considered it essential to support South Korea as part of his policy to contain the spread of communism. The United States had four infantry divisions in Japan, but it took time and resources to transport them to Korea. Some of the first U.S. forces in Korea were an advance force from 4th Infantry Division, Task Force Smith. America began the war with ill-trained and ill-equipped units; the price was paid in blood. By the end of the war, the Army had mobilized 2,834,000 men and was once again dominant on the battlefield.

After the Korean War, President Eisenhower's administration devised a policy that placed a major emphasis on airpower and America's nuclear superiority. This policy was referred to as the "New Look." The competition between the U.S. and Soviet economic and political philosophies led to the prolonged Cold War between the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc and the U.S.-led Western Bloc. The U.S. government viewed its involvement in South Vietnam as part of its larger strategy of communism containment. In 1955, Ngo Dinh Diem was elected president of the Republic of Vietnam. In the years that followed, communist-supported insurgents fought against the Diem government. North Vietnam invaded Laos and built invasion routes through Laos and Cambodia, which they used to insert thousands of North Vietnam Army troops into the south. U.S. military advisers were embedded at every level of the South Vietnamese armed forces. U.S. policy was that the South Vietnamese government, and not the United States, was responsible for defeating the guerrillas. In late 1963, a military coup overthrew the Diem government and several different governments formed and fell over the next few years. In 1965, U.S. policy changed to a commitment of U.S. forces to defeat the guerrillas in South Vietnam.

Strategic Lessons¹⁶

Chiefs of Staff Generals Matthew B. Ridgway and Maxwell D. Taylor disagreed with the President's "New Look" policy and argued that airpower and nuclear bombs did not reduce the need for powerful, mobile ground forces to seize land and control populations. They argued that as adversaries gained nuclear parity they would provoke confrontations so limited in size that the United States would not resort to nuclear weapons. President Eisenhower disagreed with their arguments and his defense policy continued to emphasize "New Look" throughout his administration. Both Chiefs of Staff eventually retired in frustration over the President's position.¹⁷ ***Neither of them could persuade the President to change his policy. Further, their campaigns against the "New Look" policy may have distracted them from what they might have accomplished with institutional internal changes. For example, the abortive Army "pentomic divisions" were developed during General Taylor's tenure.***¹⁸ Over the next few years, the Soviets became increasingly confrontational, leading to several crisis points in Berlin, Cuba, Laos and South Vietnam. By the early 1960s, the Soviet Union's parity with the United States was no longer disputed. In response to this parity, U.S. defense policy shifted to a flexible response that considered limited war as the preferred method for containing communism, with massive nuclear retaliation reserved as a last resort.

*Institutional Lessons*¹⁹

In 1953, Army Chief of Staff General Lawton Collins ordered the establishment of a combat development organization because World War II-era weapons and doctrine had proved ineffective during the Korean War. Combat Developments would shortly produce modern weapon systems such as the M60 tank and M113 armored personnel carrier. In 1957, Chief of Staff General Taylor attempted to guide the service into the age of nuclear weapons by restructuring the infantry division into the short-lived “pentomic divisions.” It is difficult to understand why he directed the Army to invest significant time and effort in developing a force to fight on an atomic battlefield while he was arguing that the Army needed to be prepared to fight conventional small wars. In retrospect, this is where he should have focused his internal efforts. ***Because General Taylor focused the bulk of his energy and influence on fighting the “New Look” policy, the Army was not adequately preparing for the evolving world.***

In 1960, Vice Chief of Staff General Clyde Eddleman began a force modernization effort that produced a more mobile and mechanized Army based on the Reorganization Objective Army Division (ROAD) design. ROAD fielded the new M60 tanks and M113 armored personnel carriers and required a major reorganization for divisions and brigades. There were four types of divisions: infantry, armor, airborne and mechanized. The armor and mechanized divisions were designed to fight conventional forces in a European theater while the airborne and infantry were more suited for low-intensity conflicts. Vietnam required the Army to adapt these forces, designed for conventional warfare, to conduct counterinsurgency operations. Airmobile operations were designed primarily in response to Vietnam’s difficult environment, and the UH-1 Huey and AH-1 Cobra helicopters became a familiar part of most combat operations. Finally, Army Special Forces, originally designed to train and support insurgents, became experts at counterinsurgency operations.

After withdrawal from Vietnam, the Army experienced the return of a down budget cycle, leading to cuts in funds and reductions in manpower. There were several reasons for this down budget cycle. The Army had grown in size to support the war and now those Soldiers, especially the conscripts, wanted to be discharged. Another reason was that President Richard M. Nixon had changed the defense policy from maintaining a force to fight two and a half wars to a force that could fight one and a half wars, as stated in his Guam Doctrine. Finally, these reduced requirements for the Army made it easier to end the draft and to transition to an all-volunteer force. The draft had been an issue of great contention during the protests against the Vietnam War. To gain support for his presidential campaign, President Nixon had promised to end the draft. So, after many studies and much debate, Congress officially ended the draft in 1973. In July of that same year, Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird directed the Army to begin all-volunteer recruiting. Chief of Staff General William C. Westmoreland, whatever his private misgivings, publicly supported the all-volunteer force, as did Chief of Staff General Creighton W. Abrams, Jr., who was responsible for its initial implementation. Their major concerns were to get congressional funds necessary for incentives to entice quality recruits and to determine what changes the Army needed to make in discipline, training and benefits to retain quality volunteers.

These reasons contributed to the continued decline in Army endstrength. Eventually, General Abrams became convinced that the Army was becoming too small and increased the number of active divisions to 16 without an increase in endstrength. General Abrams filled the positions in the 16 divisions by shifting manpower from the institutional Army to the operational Army. He also assigned reserve component “round-out” brigades to active divisions

and moved combat support and combat service support functions to the reserve. Some critics argued that maintaining more divisions without adequate manpower contributed to a hollow force. However, General Abrams felt that reliance on the reserve component would help gain the support of the American people in the next major conflict and avoid the dissent felt during the Vietnam War. He told any officer who cared to listen: “They’re never going to take us to war again without calling up the reserves.”²⁰ ***General Abrams recognized that the public and political environment demanded force reductions. Thus, rather than campaigning for more active forces during a drawdown period, he focused on institutional internal change that paid great dividends in the future.*** General Abrams established the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) and charged it with training, reforming and modernizing the post-Vietnam Army. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, successive Chiefs of Staff and TRADOC commanders focused on training and preparing the Army for future war within the constraints of limited resources. These Army leaders plowed the ground for the future Army without knowing if their preparations would ever be funded.

Post-Vietnam Period, 1979–1991²¹

The 1979 U.S. embassy hostage crisis in Iran and the nation’s inability to rescue its citizens by military means led to renewed public and political support for the nation’s defense establishment, including the Army. President Ronald Reagan announced a national security policy that sought not just to contain communism but to begin to roll it back. He reversed the previous policy of “détente” and emphasized peace through strength. Congress increased defense spending to support this policy and passed the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 (Goldwater–Nichols Act) to increase the authorities of the combatant commanders and to improve coordination between the departments. The Army focused on conducting joint operations and targeted its budget increases at modernization, training and increased compensation for personnel. The U.S. invasion of Panama in 1989 (Operation Just Cause) is considered one of the first successful joint operations under the new law. By 1989, the Army had completed a transformation from a post-Vietnam Army on the decline to one considered a match for any modern army in the world. While the Army was designed to defend against Soviet aggression, it was never required to execute that mission. The Soviet Union was plagued with a host of problems for years; its efforts to maintain military supremacy in the 1980s eventually led to a collapse, and it officially dissolved on 25 December 1991. The Cold War was over. This triggered the reoccurring down budget cycle to cut military funding and reduce the size of the military. Congress was looking for a peace dividend; in response, the Army began plans for a reduction from 750,000 to 580,000.

Strategic Lessons

The Goldwater–Nichols Act, the Fiscal Year 1987 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) establishing the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, ratified on 27 May 1988, substantially altered the role of the Department of the Army during the late 1980s. The Goldwater–Nichols Act transferred some authorities from the services to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), the combatant commanders and the departmental secretaries. The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff became the principal adviser to the President, the National Security Council and the Secretary of Defense. The chairman has full authority over the Joint Staff and is responsible for the development of joint doctrine. In addition, under Goldwater–Nichols, functions that previously resided within the uniformed Army Staff migrated to the Army Secretariat or the

Office of the Secretary of Defense.²² A provision of the 1987 NDAA established USSOCOM, envisioning it as a joint command with a budget independent of the services. The overwhelming majority of special operations manpower came from the Army. This redesign meant that the Army no longer led in planning for and executing low-intensity conflict. This was contrary to the Army's long-standing argument for multipurpose forces—forces prepared for the high, middle and low end of the combat spectrum that could adapt when necessary. The INF treaty eliminated all ground-launched and cruise ballistic missiles with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers. This struck the Pershing II missile from the Army's inventory, a move that worked toward eliminating the Army as a nuclear player. These strategic external changes reduced the Army's responsibilities at both the high end and the low end of the combat spectrum and seemed to focus the Army on conventional warfare.

Institutional Lessons²³

The Army conducted major force restructuring during this period under the Army of Excellence (AOE) concept. While endstrength actually decreased under AOE from 781,000 to 772,000 Soldiers, the Army increased its combat divisions from 16 active and eight National Guard to 18 active and ten National Guard. The Army adapted its combat operations doctrine from Active Defense to AirLand Battle, designed to fight a Soviet invasion of Europe by emphasizing three types of operations: close, deep and rear. The successful implementation of this doctrine was enhanced greatly by the development of five new weapon systems. The “big five” systems included the M1 Abrams main battle tank, the M2 and M3 Bradley fighting vehicles, the Black Hawk and Apache helicopters and the Patriot air defense missile. When the Army budget increased under President Reagan, Chief of Staff General John Wickham focused on modernizing equipment, providing incentives to recruit and retain the highest quality Soldiers and providing the best training possible from the individual to the unit level. The quality of the Army improved during this period, yet its endstrength remained the same. ***Senior Army leader investments in institutional internal changes during a down period can pay big dividends when an up period occurs.*** General Abrams and other Chiefs of Staff invested in changing the Army internally after Vietnam and throughout the 1970s and President Reagan supported the growth and modernization of Army forces. Senior Army leaders modernized because of studies and planning conducted in the previous decade.

Post-Cold War Period, 1991–2001²⁴

While the end of the Cold War did begin a reduction in forces, the reduction was relatively small in comparison to those after World War I and World War II. American patriotism and respect for the Army and the military remained high. While the government focused more on domestic issues, there was a public expectation that the United States had the responsibility to protect others. This was demonstrated in 1990–91 after Iraq had invaded Kuwait and the United States formed a coalition of allied and other partners to forcibly remove the Iraqi invaders. During Operation Desert Storm, the Army's overwhelming effectiveness against the Iraqi army validated U.S. Army doctrine, training and weapon systems. Throughout the 1990s, the Army's overseas missions increased exponentially. To support these new deployments while dealing with shrinking resources, the Army began to rely more on its reserve component. The growth in military missions prompted presidential-directed reviews or studies to determine the roles and missions of the military. These efforts led to the establishment of the Quadrennial Defense Review in 1999.

Strategic Lessons

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the post-Cold War world was sometimes considered to be unipolar, with the United States as the world's sole superpower.²⁵ As such, it could scale back its defense budget and focus on domestic and economic concerns. It continued to conduct peacekeeping missions and began to react to an increasing terrorist threat. In the 1990s, Active Army authorized endstrength went from 765,000 to 479,000 Soldiers and the number of divisions shrank from 28 (18 active and ten National Guard) to 18 (ten active and eight National Guard). Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney reluctantly submitted a plan to Congress that outlined a 25 percent decrease in the size of the armed services. The plan was in response to growing budget deficits and the rapidly diminishing threat posed by the Warsaw Pact. Part of the plan was to abandon the large-scale forward positioning of the Cold War in favor of domestic basing and enhanced force-projection capabilities, enabling a flexible and timely response to crises around the globe while reducing military expenditures.²⁶ CJCS General Colin Powell supported the plan because he thought that a "preemptive strike was necessary, or cuts would be even more severe."²⁷ ***Chief of Staff of the Army General Carl Vuono attempted to convince Congress that the Army required 640,000 Soldiers to prepare for all contingencies but was unsuccessful even after Desert Storm. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait actually occurred while Congress was holding debates on Army downsizing. This unexpected threat temporarily suspended the debate, but once Desert Storm was over, Congress continued to downsize the Army.***

Institutional Lessons²⁸

Senior Army leaders recognized that the Army was operating in a new and complex environment. The unknown or potential threats, operational environments and missions for which the Army had to prepare were far greater and more varied than when the Soviet Union was the primary threat. Therefore, Chiefs of Staff throughout the 1990s, beginning with General Gordon R. Sullivan, directed combat developers to conduct studies and experiments based on evolving national military strategies and likely future conflicts to determine which capabilities the Army would need to prevail in the future. TRADOC took the lead in helping to conduct the wargames, experiments and studies that produced concepts such as Force XXI and the Army After Next. These concepts leveraged new technologies in command, control, computers, communications and intelligence, bringing the Army into the digital age. When General Eric K. Shinseki became the Chief of Staff in 1999, he committed to a major transformation of the Army. Based on the growing number of overseas deployments and the types of missions the Army conducted, he believed that future Army missions would require a lighter and more nimble Army. He approved a long-term campaign—called Army Transformation—for adapting the Army. Army Transformation would ensure that the Army was capable of supporting current missions by maintaining and upgrading legacy force systems such as the M1 Abrams tank, the M2 Bradley fighting vehicle and AH-64 Apache, UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook helicopters.

To support combatant commanders' near- to midterm requirements, the Army designed and fielded an Interim Force, characterized by rapid deployability, tactical mobility, enhanced situational awareness and close combat capabilities. The Stryker Brigade Combat Team was designed as an Interim Force. Finally, the Objective Force was the Army of the future. It would consist of lighter, modular organizations designed to take full advantage of revolutionary technologies such as digitally enabled network-centric warfare and affordable precision guided munitions while allowing for the evolutionary change of legacy systems. Faced with continuing reductions

in manpower, Army leaders focused on developing a force that could do more with less. Most military analysts agree that the Army accomplished this goal. Unfortunately, the force developed was too short on manpower for the future insurgencies it would face in Afghanistan and Iraq. ***Once again, Army leaders had little influence over policy and lawmakers in preventing budget and endstrength cuts. However, they were able to make institutional internal changes during the same period, as demonstrated by Army Transformation and Force XXI.***

Applying Historical Lessons for Today's Leaders

The United States is beginning to transition from more than a decade of war, even as the U.S. public and political landscape is changing. Senior Army leaders are adapting the Army to this changing environment, which is characterized by an evolving national defense strategy that proposes a shift in focus to the Asia–Pacific and a struggling national economy that is still experiencing the effects of a global recession. While senior Army leaders have defined the Army's role in the evolving defense strategy, its relevance is challenged increasingly during the competition for defense resources constrained by budget cuts. As the nation refines its strategic priorities and struggles with economic challenges, senior Army leaders must understand the coming changes and plan the path forward assiduously.

The Emerging Strategic Environment²⁹

The emerging strategic environment is complex and no clear primary threat exists. Instead, America faces an interconnected global operational environment populated by a multitude of opportunists. This complex environment poses a wide range of possible threats under chaotic conditions, with local events having global consequences. The emerging environment will have fewer unequivocal friends and foes. Instead, most actors will appear across a continuum. Regular forces, irregular forces, criminals, refugees and others intermingle in this environment and interact across space, cyberspace, social networks and law. Each actor has an agenda, often at odds with America's objectives, those of other actors and the goals of the existing political order. In addition to a broad range of readily available conventional weapons, state and nonstate actors can select from an array of affordable technologies that can be adapted in unconventional ways, including an increasing use of cyberspace. Social media enables even small groups to mobilize people and resources in ways that can quickly constrain or disrupt operations. The strategic environment extends beyond the threat environment. Domestically, it is dominated by the health of the U.S. economy, which compounds the effects of today's down budget cycle for the Army.

Strategic Debate

The U.S. withdrawal from Iraq in 2011 and the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014 have triggered a down budget cycle of reduced funding and manpower. There is also external directed change in the form of new strategy, policy and legislation that directly impacts the Army. In 2012, the President and the Secretary of Defense issued new strategic guidance that established a shift in strategic focus to the Asia–Pacific.³⁰ This shift is supported by a change in the defense budget to give the Navy and Air Force higher priority—a change from the previous decade, when support to land forces was the focus. Because the new strategic guidance relies more on air and sea assets, the Army expects its share of budget cuts to be proportionally larger. Congress has already mandated personnel cuts across the services and most military analysts predict additional reductions. Current guidance for the Army is to reduce authorized active Army endstrength from 562,000 in 2012 to 490,000 by 2017.

Institutional Opportunities

Army Secretaries and Chiefs of Staff knew that a decade of war was going to cause long-term challenges for the Army. As early as 2007, senior Army leaders begin to describe the Army as “out of balance” as demands exceeded capability. The rise in suicides and domestic violence are indicative of stress brought on by multiple deployments. Weapon systems and equipment need repair or replacement due to sustained combat operations in harsh environments. Soldiers and units became proficient at counterinsurgency operations but at the expense of proficiency for other contingency operations.

The Chief of Staff, Army directed the Army Staff and TRADOC to analyze the emerging environment and requirements through studies, wargames and experiments and to develop a way ahead for the Army. This analysis is ongoing, but the Army’s current response is best described in the *Army Strategic Planning Guidance (ASPG)* for 2013. The *ASPG* is a response to the strategic external guidance from the President and the Secretary of Defense, but it also plans for Army internal change to the emerging operational environment. In it, the Chief of Staff provides his vision for the Army:

The Army is globally responsive and regionally engaged; it is an indispensable partner and provider of a full range of capabilities to combatant commanders in a joint, inter-agency, intergovernmental and multinational environment. As part of the joint force and as America’s Army, in all that we offer, we guarantee the agility, versatility and depth to prevent, shape and win.³¹

“Prevent, shape and win” frames the Army’s role as part of the joint force. The *ASPG* describes the Army of the future as a regionally aligned, mission-tailored force organized by leaders into squad- to corps-sized formations empowered by Soldiers. These Soldiers will be connected to the network in vehicles that increase mobility and lethality while retaining survivability to meet the specific requirements of the combatant commander across the full range of military operations. The Chief of Staff’s intention is that future Army forces accomplish the most complex missions with greater agility, in challenging human terrain, while able to respond with a range of capabilities and headquarters, from squad to joint task force level.

As the Army began to withdraw from Iraq, Army leaders focused on reconstituting the force while maintaining the capability to support current missions. Army capability development focused on the Army of 2020, considering this effort represented the Army required after withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Recommendations for Today’s Leaders

As before, the Defense budget is being reduced and the size of the Army is a principal subject of the budget debates. Once again, the United States is on the cusp of fielding a military that is insufficient for achieving its strategic objectives, thereby creating a strategy–resource mismatch. Once again, senior Army leaders must decide how to balance personal efforts and leadership between their strategic and institutional responsibilities. Today’s senior Army leaders appear to have learned from the lessons of the past, but historical analysis reviews show that there is more to be accomplished. Recommendations for senior Army leaders include:

- Do not expend substantial political capital arguing for an increased budget and end-strength. Use the budget debates as leverage for institutional changes.

- Focus Army energy on making the internal adaptations to doctrine, organizations, training, materiel, leader development and education, personnel and facilities that posture it to respond when the inevitable next first battle occurs.
- Identify and invest in key technologies and other modernization efforts that must endure during this period of reduced budgets, such that the Army can rapidly leverage them when the budget cycle again shifts.
- Continue to demand rigorous analysis of future environments and threats. Open the aperture of the Army from the small opening driven by a needed wartime focus to the long-range aperture of an army with an eye to the future.
- Prepare the Army to fight the next war with the resources available, while ensuring that research and development continues, identifying the next big ideas and focusing science and technology on those capabilities that matter in the next fight.

Conclusion

The Army's most senior leadership has two difficult roles, which in times of postwar transition can be at cross-purposes. As strategic advisors, they are charged with providing input to civilian leadership on how to achieve policy aims and how to transition the force to achieve the national security strategy. Throughout U.S. history, the American people have chosen to draw down the military, allowing hope for peace to overcome previous experience. As a result, the U.S. military has often been left unprepared for the subsequent strategic surprise that precipitated the next first battle. This review has demonstrated that successful Army leaders used these periods to focus on posturing the Army for that surprise and, rather than spending political capital arguing against policies to little tangible advantage, they used the drawdown period to negotiate the best possible force for the nation. They formed their judgments and based their decision by analyzing the future as they saw it, rather than as the American people hoped it would be.

Today we face another such choice. The Army can continue to expect smaller budgets and reductions in size in the coming years. After 12 years of war the Army must adapt to two major categories of change: strategic external directed changes from government and internal institutional changes in response to changes in the operational environment. This study indicates that today's senior Army leaders must focus the majority of their personal attention on driving internal Army change. As we have shown, *those leaders who have focused personal attention and leadership on internal institutional change have been more successful at preparing the Army for the next strategic surprise.*

History shows that there is little that senior Army leaders can do to influence strategic external changes. Leaders can advise and they can warn, but ultimately and appropriately they will be given a budget and an endstrength with which they must prepare to defend the nation. The art of successful strategic leadership has been to gain sufficient maneuver room in the policy and budget debates to structure the Army to meet the next surprise as the Army leadership understand it, not as the policymakers hope for it to be.

As senior Army leaders inform and advise, they should support defense reforms that provide the best defense for the nation. They should develop an Army plan for adaptation that supports joint and other service requirements. The plan must reflect a realistic analysis of future threats and conflicts. They must lead the Army as it adapts across doctrine, organization,

training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel and facilities. The Army is good at internal institutional change. It has developed organizations, processes and procedures to analyze future requirements and to manage the Army's adaptation.

As we continue in this down budget cycle, senior Army leaders must prepare for events most people prefer to ignore. After World War I—the so-called “war to end all wars”—the American public believed that war was a phenomenon of the past. Any future conflict would be prevented by the League of Nations or by U.S. diplomacy. Even as late as December 1941, the prevalent expectation was that any U.S. involvement in World War II would consist of industrial support and some naval and air support. Yet, in less than two years, the nation would have more than 8,000,000 Soldiers once again fighting around the globe.

Endnotes

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- ³ Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History, Vol. I: The United States Army and the Forging of a Nation, 1775–1917* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2009).
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- ⁶ Mark Skinner Watson, *United States Army in World War II: The War Department—Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1991).
- ⁷ This presumption that diplomacy can prevent conflict has risen in popularity again.
- ⁸ Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).
- ⁹ Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History, Vol. II: The United States Army in a Global Era, 1917–2003* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2005).
- ¹⁰ The Army faces the same issue today. It must utilize its Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles despite the fact that they were optimized for a very specific environment. Balancing modernization with recapitalization will be a significant challenge during the drawdown.
- ¹¹ Watson, *United States Army in World War II*; Stewart, *American Military History, Vol. II*.
- ¹² Alice C. Cole et al., *The Department of Defense, Documents on Establishment and Organization, 1944–1978* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1978).
- ¹³ Palmer retired after World War I and was recalled to active duty for World War II.
- ¹⁴ Stewart, *American Military History, Vol. II*.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Cole et al., *The Department of Defense*.
- ¹⁷ President Kennedy leveraged General Taylor’s action in the 1960 presidential election and appointed him as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs following the election. No service chief has publically argued over a policy difference since Maxwell Taylor.
- ¹⁸ If today’s Army leaders become too engrossed in debating strategic change, such as the shift to the Pacific or AirSea Battle, they will miss opportunities for internal institutional change.
- ¹⁹ Stewart, *American Military History, Vol. II*.
- ²⁰ H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 150–151.
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- ²³ James T. Stensvaag, ed., *Preparing the Army for War: A Historical Overview of the Army Training and Doctrine Command, 1973–1998*, TRADOC Historical Study Series (Fort Monroe, VA: Military History Office, 1998).
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ “United States of America Country Profile,” BBC News, 10 January 2012, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/country_profiles/1217752.stm.
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- ³¹ *Army Strategic Planning Guidance 2013*.

