

A REPORT OF THE CSIS
NEW DEFENSE APPROACHES
PROJECT

U.S. Ground Force Capabilities through 2020

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Cover photo credit: *left*: U.S. Marines with 2nd Platoon, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment and Afghan soldiers arrive at their objective, DoD photo by Tech. Sgt. Efren Lopez, U.S. Air Force, <http://www.defense.gov/photos/newspphoto.aspx?newsphotoid=12359>; *top right*: U.S. army paratroopers from the 82nd Airborne Division, DoD photo by Airman 1st Class James Richardson, U.S. Air Force, <http://www.defense.gov/Photos/NewsPhoto.aspx?NewsPhotoID=14782>; *middle right*: U.S. Marines with India Company, Battalion Landing Team, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit run on the beach, DoD photo by Cpl. Theodore W. Ritchie, U.S. Marine Corps, <http://www.defense.gov/Photos/newspphoto.aspx?newsphotoid=11859>; *bottom right*: A U.S. Army soldier maintains a security watch while M2A2 Bradley armored vehicles prepare to cross a bridge in Arab Jabour, Iraq, DoD photo by Spc. Angelica Golindano, U.S. Army, <http://www.defense.gov/photos/newspphoto.aspx?newsphotoid=9784>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The coming year will bring pivotal decisions that will shape U.S. defense policy for the foreseeable future. Congress will determine how deeply to cut defense relative to alternative strategies to shrink the deficit. With a decade of war behind us, senior civilian and military leaders will enter the next decade determined to shape the U.S. armed forces for the future, seeking ways to leverage fewer resources to best face new challenges.

This political and fiscal environment does not bode well for U.S. ground forces. For the Army and Marine Corps in particular, the last decade has come at significant human, emotional, and fiscal cost. The country is increasingly weary of war and concerned about the national debt. There is little enthusiasm for devoting dwindling resources to large ground forces designed to prevail in the types of military engagements of the past 10 years. At the same time, many believe the era of large-scale conventional wars has passed.

In fact, defense experts inside and outside of government increasingly express the need for a shift in U.S. defense posture focused more heavily against China's rising assertiveness in East Asia, complemented by small, lethal teams of special operators continuing to keep al Qaeda and its affiliates under unrelenting pressure wherever they might congregate. This shift suggests greater emphasis on naval, air, and special operations capabilities, and a substantially reduced role for traditional ground forces.

This approach is appealing on multiple levels. Consistent with fiscal demands, it suggests opportunities for savings by cutting ground forces, which seem to have less future utility. It also plays to America's conception of its natural advantage, the ability to more effectively leverage advanced technology to its benefit. And it implies that, despite the experiences of the last decade, wars of the future can finally be conducted from afar, or be administered so precisely, that they will command little emotional or financial attention from a public preoccupied by economic concerns.

History has demonstrated, however, that every post-Cold War president has come into office vowing to avoid large, costly, foreign interventions requiring tens of thousands of "boots on the ground," only to have their hand forced by unforeseen events. Today's answer to unexpected crises that arise outside of Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean is for the U.S. military to rely more heavily on allies, partners, and other U.S. government agencies when the need arises. What makes sense in theory, however, runs up against the reality of diminished allies, uncertain partners, and civilian agencies slow to the fight.

It is within this context that this report seeks to look more closely at the ground force capabilities that are likely to be most relevant in the future. Based on a comprehensive review of threats and challenges, as well as trends in the size and character of both U.S. and allied ground forces, it reaches three major conclusions. The first is that ground forces remain relevant, useful, and increasingly unique and will likely remain in greater demand over the next 10 years than many

expect. Second, the capabilities associated with strategic and operational responsiveness, forcible entry, and armored maneuver (e.g., armored- and armor-protected infantry and tanks) will be broadly useful to and important in the future strategic environment. On the latter—armored maneuver—the circumstances under which these capabilities are employed and their distribution on the battlefield will most likely change fundamentally. However, their protection and firepower remain highly relevant. Third, satisfying future demands for building other nations' security forces or providing large-scale stabilization forces can be managed without adding new specialized military capabilities (e.g., standing military adviser, constabulary, or post-conflict reconstruction formations).

These conclusions run counter to conventional wisdom. First, they serve as a caution against underestimating the role of ground forces in the future, not only against high-end state competitors and small terrorist networks, but particularly in the historically active “messy middle.” This includes crisis interventions in the developing world, wars *within* important states, or peace operations. Second, they suggest that the future ground force role is not what many presume (or would like) it to be. It will be broader than building up like-minded friends; instead, “traditional warfighting capabilities” will be relevant across a wide range of contingencies. They will be more relevant and useful, in fact, than specialized units or formations tailored to meet unique missions like security force assistance or stability operations. Flexible ground forces *that retain many of their traditional features* will be increasingly unique globally, remain highly useful, and will offer the greatest range of options to future national leaders.

The conclusion of this report is that the unique contributions of ground forces—the ability to take and hold terrain, operate discriminately in close proximity to vulnerable populations, and instill confidence in allies and partners—will be no less vital in the coming decade. The challenge is identifying and articulating the risks associated with strategic changes in ground force capability. This report attempts to transcend the very simplistic argument that pits a counterinsurgency/counterterrorism future against a future dominated by tensions between competing states. Instead it seeks to present the most comprehensive menu possible of very real ground contingency demands, comparing those to the current and projected supply of ground force capabilities.

This may seem farfetched or excessive in light of the potential dangers posed by China's rapidly modernizing military. But it is easy to conceive of instances, both in the recent past and the plausible future, in which a diminished ground force capability would greatly restrict presidential options for addressing crises. If Egypt's uprising had threatened to disrupt the Suez Canal and key oil networks, for example, and national or regional leaders had asked for help, only ground forces would have been capable of seizing and protecting the 300-plus miles of critical infrastructure resident in that country. Precarious governments in nuclear North Korea or Pakistan, should they falter or break down, would similarly create immediate, large-scale crises to which ground forces would be highly relevant. In any of the three instances, U.S. forces may have been called upon to respond in force under severe time constraints, initiate complex operations immediately upon arrival, and fight very discriminately against an array of hostile actors with highly lethal weapons.

Beyond specific contingencies, but equally important, the mere presence of ground forces reassures allies and partners in Asia, the Persian Gulf, Africa, and Europe. Air and naval power may make substantial contributions to winning future conflicts and to deterring enemies, but only ground forces forward deployed signal the ultimate commitment—the resolve and willingness to put American men and women shoulder to shoulder with the populations of foreign partners in harm's way.

The challenges that adversaries' advancing capabilities pose to inserting large numbers of ground forces in numerous areas around the world are real, but the belief that naval and air power alone will overcome those challenges and effect decisive outcomes is ahistorical and incomplete. Instead, the United States must develop a comprehensive approach to managing this problem that ensures U.S. forces can gain physical access to critical regions of the world when needed, while remaining prepared to continue sustained operations on the ground as necessary to ensure a favorable resolution. This will require harnessing the respective advantages of the entire joint force—not only across air, sea, space, and cyberspace, but also on land.

This is not to suggest that ground force capabilities cannot or should not change—larger numbers of heavy ground forces are clearly unrealistic in the current context. We do need, however, a more complete and tangible picture of future land-based challenges and of the force that can best address them. This report is intended to serve as a step in this direction. Whether we like it or not, those who threaten U.S. interests still have a vote, and it may well be for conflicts that cannot be won decisively without employing the myriad capabilities resident in our ground forces.



INTRODUCTION

As an era of greater austerity rushes in, policymakers face numerous difficult choices about how to prioritize shrinking resources. This study is an effort to inform those choices in the particular area of U.S. ground force capabilities, based on an examination of how well current plans align with potential future challenges ground forces might be called upon to address.

The study team employed a straightforward approach. First, the team surveyed the existing literature and solicited expert opinion to inform a characterization of the types of operations in which ground forces might engage over the next decade. Second, to amplify that understanding, the team explored in more detail the primary tasks those operations would involve. Finally, the team assessed, at a very high level, the current and planned capabilities that future leaders might be able to call upon to conduct those missions. The results indicate that future investments in two areas—stability operations and security force assistance—may exceed what will be needed. Capabilities in three other areas—strategic responsiveness, armored maneuver, and forcible entry—are particularly important, and either are or may become areas where, should they be cut back too far, U.S. options to meet key threats would be severely constrained.

The report that follows is a high-level summary of more detailed analysis laid out in three comprehensive appendixes. The analysis is based on an extensive literature review, interviews, and two large workshops with experts representing numerous key stakeholders (workshop participants are listed in Appendix D). Prior to its release, this report was also vetted by a panel of former senior officials from the U.S. military and the executive and legislative branches.

The report is organized into three chapters. Chapter 1 describes the range of future ground-centric operations, analyzes key operational tasks that relate to those operations, and draws inferences about the relative utility of ground force capabilities going forward. Chapter 2 summarizes trends in the aggregate capacity and nature of capabilities relevant to future ground operations for likely partners, for the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and special operations forces, and for U.S. civilian agencies. Chapter 3 evaluates how well the challenges described in Chapter 1 align with the trends in the supply of ground force capabilities outlined in Chapter 2 and highlights key areas of potential disconnect.

The main body of the report is aimed at policymakers, whose level of familiarity with the specifics of ground force operations may vary. The appendixes are provided for those who wish a more thorough explanation of the information presented in subsequent chapters. Appendix A provides additional specifics about the types of operations considered, the criteria used to develop them, and their characteristics. Appendix B offers additional detail about the key tasks associated with the success of the operational types. Finally, Appendix C provides a more complete discussion of aggregate ground force supply.

1

FUTURE GROUND FORCE CHALLENGES

Types of Contingencies

Assessments of the security environment in which American forces may engage in the future have consistently concluded that it will have at least two major characteristics: uncertainty and complexity.¹ This study's evaluation of a more specific subset of those challenges—those for which the responses would likely be ground centric—reaffirms this conclusion.

The study team developed its view of future challenges in a series of sequential steps. The first was a broadly scoped survey of existing literature about ground-centric operations that included existing military doctrine but also the analysis of outside experts and scholars. From that, the study team derived a list of 14 future operational types and their basic characteristics, to include likely levels of violence, the probability a given operational type might come up for consideration by national leaders, the kinds of potential adversaries involved, and other key features. Basic definitions of each type can be found in the text box on the next page. Table 1 summarizes the operational types and some of their key characteristics.

In practice, combinations of one or more of these operational types may be the rule rather than the exception. As one example, over time Operation Iraqi Freedom has included at least six of the operational types outlined below: a major combat campaign, opposed stabilization, seize and secure operations, a counter-network campaign, foreign internal defense, and support to foreign unconventional forces.

That said, the unit of analysis here was set at a level where each operational type could be a stand-alone contingency. For example, in this context, raids are represented as a unique operational type. This is not intended to suggest that they could not also be a component of a larger counter-network or major combat campaign. Instead, operational types imply that the entire set of capabilities that support that type would be the lowest level of prudent disaggregation before operational success is at risk.

1. See, for example, U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, February 2010), p iii; and U.S. Joint Forces Command, *The Joint Operating Environment* (Suffolk, VA: U.S. Joint Forces Command, February, 2010), <http://www.fas.org/man/eprint/joe2010.pdf>; as well as numerous other works cited in the bibliography.

Future Operational Types

Show of force—Dispatching, repositioning, or increasing the visibility of forward-deployed U.S. forces to compel hostile actors to cease threatening behaviors in advance of open hostilities (e.g., the 1988 deployment of U.S. forces to Honduras to counter Nicaraguan invasion).

Humanitarian assistance and consequence management—Operations typically in support of civilian agencies of the U.S. government, state and local authorities, or a foreign partner government in order to temporarily relieve human suffering, provide basic public goods, and help offset immediate threats to public safety and health in the wake of foreign catastrophes or domestic disasters (e.g., relief efforts on the Gulf Coast following Hurricane Katrina in 2005).

Foreign internal defense—Military support and assistance to a foreign partner combating serious internal conflict and instability (e.g., the provision of training and equipment to Colombian forces, 1996–2006).

Support to foreign unconventional forces—Covert and/or clandestine military support and assistance to a surrogate force of irregular foreign fighters operating against a state or group hostile to the United States (e.g., U.S. SOF support to the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, 2002).

Enabling operation—Typically involving few or no U.S. combat forces, these operations support the defense of an ally or underwrite partner-led combat, disaster relief, or law enforcement operations (e.g., the provision of intelligence, communications, and logistical support to Australian forces in East Timor, 1999).

Noncombatant evacuation operation—The orderly evacuation from foreign territory of U.S., host nation, and designated third country nationals facing the threat of imminent harm under the protection of U.S. military forces (e.g., the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Liberia, 1996).

Peacekeeping—Operations to separate warring states or factions, monitor their activities, dissuade resumption of hostilities, and support implementation of a negotiated end to conflict (e.g., the deployment of U.S. troops to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995 in order to enforce a cease-fire and maintain order).

Seize and secure—Operations undertaken to prevent critical foreign infrastructure (e.g., ports, pipelines, or canals), dominant terrain (e.g., strategic choke points), and/or dangerous capabilities (principally chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons and/or their delivery systems) from being actively threatened by intrastate conflict, instability, or illegitimate seizure (e.g., the Anglo-French seizure of the Suez Canal in 1956).

Human security—Operations conducted to protect large numbers of innocent civilians from grave harm due to civil conflict (e.g., the UN-authorized operation in Somalia to provide protection and security for relief effort, 1992–1993).

Future Operational Types *(continued)*

Opposed stabilization—Operations conducted when a state has lost control over security in all or part of its sovereign territory and the associated disorder and internal strife threatens core U.S. interests. The minimum essential objective for intervention is establishment of “an environment orderly enough that most routine civil functions [can] be carried out”¹ (e.g., the “surge” of U.S. forces into Iraq, 2007).

Sanctuary denial—Operations undertaken to redress or forestall significant harm to core U.S. interests by temporarily controlling hostile territory, precluding terrorist, insurgent, or serious criminal activity posing persistent hazards, and/or disrupting or destroying adversary leadership, networks, and capabilities that enable hostile or illegal actions (e.g., the U.S. invasion of Cambodia in 1970).

Raid—Small-scale, short-duration military operations undertaken in pursuit of a set of very specific objectives such as seizing individuals or disabling threatening capabilities (e.g., the 2011 raid on Osama bin Laden’s compound).

Counter-network campaign—A dedicated, sustained effort comprising multiple discrete military actions with the specific purpose of systematically disrupting or dismantling hostile nonstate networks—terrorist, criminal, insurgent, or otherwise (e.g., the on-going U.S. campaign against leaders of al Qaeda and its key affiliates).

Major combat campaign—Large-scale military operations focused on the defeat of an enemy state’s conventional and irregular military capabilities and methods (e.g., the United Kingdom’s recapture of the Falkland Islands, 1982).

1. James T. Quinlivan, “Force Requirements in Stability Operations,” *Parameters* XXV (Winter 1995/1996): 60.

Table 1: Operational Types and Key Characteristics

	Operational Characteristics							
	Scale (expected)	Scale (range)	Probability (expected)	Probability (range)	Strategic Warning	Duration	Adversary Types	Permissiveness
Show of force	Medium	Medium to Large	High	Moderate to High	Extremely Short	Short to Moderate	M, L, S	Uncertain
Humanitarian asst/consequence mgmt	Small	Very Small to Large	Extremely High	Extremely High	Extremely Short	Short to Moderate	C, T	Permissive to Uncertain
Foreign internal defense	Very Small	Up to Medium	Extremely High	Extremely High	Moderate	Long to Very Long	C, T, I, M	Permissive
Spt to foreign unconventional forces	Very Small	Up to Medium	Moderate	Low to Moderate	Long	Short to Long	T, I, M, L, S	Semi- to non-permissive
Enabling operation	Small to Medium	Very Small to Large	High	Moderate to Extremely High	Extremely Short to Moderate	Short to Long	C, T, I, M, L, S	Permissive to non-permissive
Non-combatant evacuation	Very Small	Up to Medium	Extremely High	Extremely High	Extremely Short	Very Short to Short	T, I, M, L	Semi-permissive to Uncertain
Peacekeeping	Small to Medium	Very Small to Medium	High	High to Extremely High	Moderate	Long to Very Long	I, M, L, S*	Semi-permissive
Seize and secure	Medium	Medium to Large	Moderate	Low to High	Extremely Short	Moderate to Long	I, M, L, S	Non-permissive to Uncertain
Human security operation	Medium	Small to Large	High	Moderate to Extremely High	Moderate	Long to Very Long	M, L	Permissive to non-permissive
Opposed stabilization	Large	Medium to Large	Moderate	Low to High	Short to Moderate	Long to Very Long	I, M, L	Semi-permissive to Hostile
Sanctuary denial	Medium	Very Small to Large	Moderate	Moderate to High	Moderate	Short to Long	C, T, I, M	Non-permissive to Hostile
Raid	Very Small	Very Small to Small	Extremely High	Extremely High	Extremely Short	Extremely Short to Short	C, T, I, M, L, S	Non-permissive to Hostile
Counter-network campaign	Small	Very Small to Small	Extremely High	Extremely High	Long	Long to Very Long	C, T, I	Uncertain to Hostile
Major combat campaign	Large	Medium to Large	Low	Low to Moderate	Long	Moderate to Very Long	M, L, S	Hostile

Keys							
Scale	Probability conditions will arise over next decade	Strategic warning/Duration	Adversary				
Very Small	Up to battalion	Low	25 percent or lower	Extremely Short	Hours	C - Criminal	L - Limited
Small	Smaller than brigade or MEU	Moderate	26 to 50 percent	Short	Days	T - Terrorist	Capability military
Medium	Brigade or MEU to division	High	51 to 75 percent	Moderate	Weeks	I - Insurgent	S - Sophisticated
Large	Larger than division or MEF	Extremely High	76 to 99 percent	Long	Months	M - Militia	Capability military
				Very Long	One to several years		

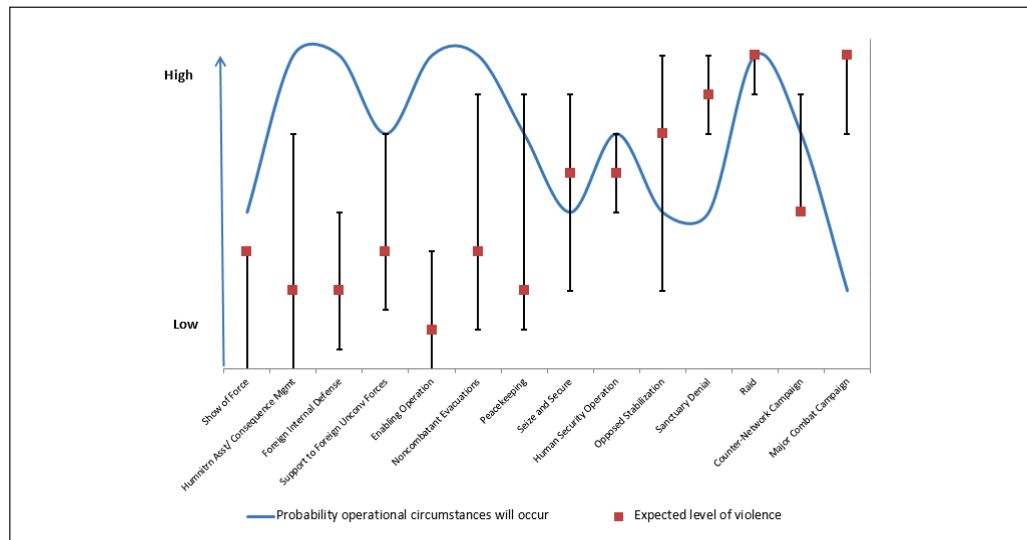
A more detailed description of each operational type and its primary characteristics is at Appendix A. In brief, however, a review of the 14 types offers a number of key insights:

- Overall, future operations will be more complex.** Some of the “messiest” operations are becoming more probable as well. Many may take place in countries with little or no state control and involve multiple adversaries who employ very lethal high- and low-end capabilities and pursue different and often competing ends. The conflicts themselves might occur among large civilian populations. Though desirable given the experience of the last decade, opting out of them may be difficult, as they can occur in areas where key strategic interests are at risk; interests ranging from access to key resources or regions and control of weapons of mass destruction to formal or informal alliance commitments.
- As a result of many of the trends noted above, certain operational types merit more deliberate attention in future force planning.** These include the potential for opposed stabilization missions, which comprise not only the counterinsurgency operations that have become familiar over the past decade but also broader versions of stabilization that are aimed at imposing some level of basic civil order after central authority has failed in important states (e.g., collapsed North Korea or Pakistan). Stabilization once implied lower levels of lethality, as in the case of classic counterinsurgency. However, with the Arab Spring as just one example, states possessing sophisticated military capabilities can suffer crippling internal conflict. Any stabilization operation in cases like this would confront more capable adversaries. In addition, certain operational types that seemed remote possibilities in the past are becoming far more plausible. These include missions narrowly focused on inserting forces to take control of critical infrastructure, geography, or dangerous weapons. What links these operations is the continuing need for many of the capabilities long associated with major combat operations.

- Significant violence is more likely across operation types.** The forces of globalization, the proliferation of sophisticated military capabilities, and advances in and broad dispersal of technology, manufacturing capability, and technical knowledge have increased the potential for harm resident in a wide community of state proxies, nonstate actors, and even “super-empowered individuals,”² chipping away at state authority and states’ traditional monopoly on violence. Ultimately, this new “democratization of violence” means that almost every future operational type has the potential for sophisticated armed resistance on some level.³ In many cases, the potential for extreme violence is very real. This includes some operational types that have generally been assumed to be less intense (e.g., humanitarian assistance or human security operations). By implication, capabilities to ensure forces will be adequately protected, can enter various areas at will, and will enjoy freedom of movement upon arrival are increasing in value.

Figure 1 depicts expected levels of violence across operational types and their relationship to the probability each type might occur. One implication is that traditional models that depict an inverse relationship between expected levels of combat intensity and probability of occurrence are less valid in the future. While the operational type that would involve the largest levels of sustained violence—major combat campaign—remains the least likely, the trend for the remainder of potential engagements is not linear. Similarly, while there is a basic presumption that most operations of a given type would involve greater violence as one moves along the operational spectrum, within each operational type, violence levels will vary substantially.

Figure 1: Probability and Violence Levels of Future Operations



2. Adam Elkus and Crispin Burke, “WikiLeaks, Media, and Policy: A Question of Super-Empowerment,” *Small Wars Journal*, September 29, 2010, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/558-elkus.pdf>.

3. John Robb, “Small Groups and Global Warfare,” *Global Guerrillas*, February 16, 2005, http://globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2005/02/the_democratiza.html.

- **Future operations will be global.** While developing multiple, detailed scenarios for every operational type exceeded the scope of this project, the literature review, interviews, and workshops conducted as part of the project made clear that almost every single operational type could be reasonably anticipated in every region of the world.⁴ The implications are twofold. First, any future strategy that fails to be globally comprehensive will be highly vulnerable to failure. Second, U.S. capabilities to support strategic and operational responsiveness—a combination of strategic lift by sea and air, forward-stationed or forward-deployed forces, and prepositioned stocks—will be a vital component of America’s ability to address future challenges.

Anticipating Future “Demand”

Determining what types of operations ground forces might be called upon to perform involves identifying various contingencies within a framework that is both comprehensive and discrete. Implicit in that formulation is some judgment about whether future U.S. leaders might elect to address a given set of geopolitical circumstances, and if so, what form that response might take.

The approach taken in this analysis was to minimize, to the greatest extent possible, judgments about future political actions. Instead, the study team attempted to describe a set of operational types that represent the range of responses that future leaders might *consider* should various circumstances present themselves. That effort involved making judgments about the probability that such circumstances might actually unfold, but stopped short of anticipating the decisions that might ensue.

The probability judgments presented here, therefore, are an attempt to represent, as neutrally as possible, the likelihood of certain scenarios arising, not whether U.S. forces would actually do them. In some instances, the distinction is not likely to be very meaningful. For the most part, U.S. leaders are likely to contribute military capabilities, at least to some degree, to almost every major humanitarian disaster that might occur around the globe, if forces are available. The divergence between occurrence and likely participation would presumably be greater, however, in some situations of localized ethnic conflicts, or even state collapse if it appeared to be relatively orderly and peaceful.

The implication of the “incidence-based” approach adopted here is that the projected frequencies represent a larger “demand” signal than would actually be engaged in. On the other hand, it represents a more objective baseline upon which others can then impose additional filters, depending on their particular vision of U.S. strategic priorities.

4. There are, however, some illustrative future cases laid out in Appendix A.

Key Operational Tasks

The operational-level analysis above sheds light on the range and variability of missions ground forces will face and offers some indication about the utility of some general ground force capabilities and characteristics. To further this analysis, the study team identified 19 key tasks that support each operational type (additional detail about each is in Appendix B). Although the list is not exhaustive, it is intended to cover the range of actions that must be performed to achieve success in any given contingency. The tasks are:

1. Conduct distributed mission-oriented military operations;
2. Exploit all-source intelligence, information, reconnaissance, and surveillance;
3. Gain and exploit information advantages;
4. Defend networks, conduct operations in a degraded information environment, and exploit advantages in the electro-magnetic spectrum (EMS);
5. Project forces over strategic and operational distances;
6. Conduct deliberate theater entry and opening;
7. Conduct forcible entry and theater opening;
8. Conduct entry under uncertain or ambiguous conditions;
9. Employ combined arms forces in combat;
10. Employ combined arms forces in security operations;
11. Conduct stability operations;
12. Improve capability, capacity, and performance of foreign security and paramilitary forces (security force assistance);
13. Conduct operations in permissive environments;
14. Conduct operations entirely in contested or denied territory;
15. Conduct operations under uncertain security conditions;
16. Conduct an opposed egress or egress under uncertain security conditions;
17. Operate against and recover from a large-scale biological hazard;
18. Operate against and recover from a large-scale chemical or nuclear hazard; and, finally,
19. Sustain distributed military operations for extended periods under austere conditions.

After identifying these tasks, the study team assessed their relationship to the operational types. Most tasks had the potential to be part of almost any operation, so the standard the study team applied was to identify tasks that would be *decisive to the outcome* of any given operation within a type. Thus tasks that might be conducted but would not be critical did not inform the conclusions.

The relation of tasks to operations is depicted in Table 2 (on page 10). From these relationships, the study team drew inferences about the relative importance of various capabilities associated with the tasks, based on how broadly they applied across types as well as the characteristics

of the types to which tasks were relevant (e.g., probability, warning time, or scale). Overall, this comparison indicates the following:

- **Capabilities closely associated with the performance of five key tasks will be critical across all future operational types.** The five tasks are conducting distributed operations, exploiting intelligence, exploiting information, conducting cyber and electronic warfare, and projecting forces.
- **Ground forces will need significant combat capabilities.** As further amplification on the point about increased violence evidenced by the operational typology above, a task-based review reveals that some or most incidences in 10 of 14 operational types will involve putting ground forces into environments where there is a reasonable potential for real violence and/or sophisticated opposition. This includes major combat campaigns, where this might be expected, but also a number of other operational types that are typically conceived of as more benign. The implication—that ground forces must be prepared to encounter and overcome violence—is further reinforced by the finding that 6 of the 14 mission types can be reasonably themed as combat actions. As discussed above, more probable operational types (i.e., sanctuary denial, seize and secure operations, and opposed stabilization) will require the same types of capabilities and methods as would be employed in a (less likely) major combat campaign, perhaps in equal or greater numbers. Of course, depending on the operation and adversary, the circumstances under which they are employed and the numbers, types, and distribution of higher-end capabilities will differ significantly from case to case. As even further reinforcement of this point, in eight operational types, most or all of the specific contingencies that might occur would involve ground force actions under uncertain security conditions. Still further, also in eight operational types, irrespective of whether forces enter or operate in a relatively benign environment, conditions exist where adversaries may attack U.S. forces as they exit. In total, these findings clearly indicate that most force packages must possess a minimum level of combat capability, perhaps to an even greater extent than is currently assumed.
- **Responsiveness will be at a premium.** The strategic warning associated with half of the 14 operational types ranges from hours to days. Of these 7, it is likely that 4 would be relatively small in size (less than a brigade or Marine Expeditionary Unit [MEU]), but are nonetheless likely. Three others, on the other hand, would be larger but less common. Together, these findings indicate that rapid response will continue to be essential to ground force success. Much could be handled by relatively small units, but in some instances greater capacity will be required. In the end, the very real prospect of numerous short-notice contingencies occurring in any of several far-flung locations, possibly simultaneously, and potentially requiring thousands of ground forces in response, indicates that the capabilities to project forces over great distances will be broadly relevant and important going forward.
- **Capabilities to support operations in contaminated (nuclear, chemical, biological, or radiological) environments will be critical in the future.** These circumstances could arise in at least 10 of the 14 operational types, although in most instances the likelihood is relatively low. This suggests a strong need for U.S. forces to maintain associated capabilities, as when these circumstances arise, the ability to continue operations despite them will be critical to mission success.

- **Stability operation tasks will be important to some operational types, but not the majority.** While stability operations will be a part of almost all types of contingency operations, they will be decisive some or most of the time in only 5 of 14 cases. Of those, 3 were identified as likely or very likely and would arise on short notice, but would require a relatively modest force commitment. In the other 2 less likely cases, the scale would be significantly larger, but strategic warning may be longer. By implication, while the capabilities to conduct stability operations tasks should be resident in some basic form across the ground forces (particularly because operational types can morph or combine, simultaneously and with little or no notice), it may be more important to have a strong core set of capabilities that could be rapidly expanded when needed than to have large amounts of standing capability dedicated to these tasks.
- **Security force assistance (SFA)—enhancing other nations’ self-reliance by developing their security forces and supporting institutions and processes—will be an essential part of some, but not most, future operations.** Like stability operations, security force assistance was found to be less decisive to the range of future contingencies than might be expected. The study team concluded that SFA was essential some or most of the time in only 5 of 14 cases. For all 5, strategic warning was judged in most cases to be weeks to months, suggesting that immediate response forces need not have large amounts of capacity for these tasks. Scale could vary widely, however, which indicates that an expandable capability would be relevant for these missions.

Some of these conclusions may seem antediluvian, or representative of a mindset better suited for the 1980s than for 2020. That interpretation would be mistaken, however. The finding here that conventional combat forces—including armor—matter is based not on a restatement of their utility in “traditional” missions. Instead it flows from an objective assessment indicating that while much (but not all) of the purpose for which those capabilities were originally designed—to fight other conventional forces—has dissipated, they are broadly useful and even critical to many other types of missions, ones that will persist or become even more likely going forward.

It would be similarly mistaken to view the conclusions about the relevance of stability operations and SFA capabilities as a suggestion that ground forces should repeat the errors of the past and willfully ignore the reality that such tasks will need to be conducted in the future, however distasteful. Instead, the analysis finds that these tasks remain important. But in an era of constrained resources, every specialized resource represents an opportunity cost relative to other missions. Thus the analysis is intended to suggest that decisions about these capabilities should be made with that in mind. It indicates that the costs of large amounts of specialized forces for these missions would be high and that demands can likely be best satisfied with more flexible and expansible approaches.

This chapter outlined a basic vision of the future facing ground forces and the capability areas that will be most relevant. The next describes the projected supply of ground force capabilities from three perspectives: that of likely allies, the U.S. military, and from other relevant U.S. government agencies. Chapter 3 then evaluates how that supply aligns with the challenges posited here.

Table 2: Operational Types and Key Tasks

Key Operational Tasks	Operational Types													
	Show of Force	Humanitarian assist/ consequence mgmt	Foreign internal defense	Support to foreign partner forces	Enabling operation	Non-combatant evacuation	Peacekeeping	Seize and secure	Human security operation	Opposed subablation	Sanctuary denial	Raid	Counter-network campaign	Major combat campaign
PROBABILITY	High	Extremely High	Extremely High	Moderate	High	Extremely High	High	Moderate	High	Moderate	Extremely High	Extremely High	Extremely High	Low
Conduct distributed mission-oriented military operations.	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Exploit all-source intelligence, information, reconnaissance, and surveillance.	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Gain and exploit information advantages.	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Defend networks, conduct operations in a degraded information environment, and exploit advantages in the cyber/EMS domain.	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Project forces over strategic and operational distances.	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Conduct deliberate theater entry and opening.	S	M	M	M	M	F	M	M	M	F				S
Conduct entry under uncertain or ambiguous conditions.	S	F	F	M		M	F	M	F	S	S	S	S	S
Conduct forcible theater entry and opening.						F		S		S	M	S	S	S
Conduct operations in permissive environments.	S	M	S		M	F	S		S					
Conduct operations entirely in contested or denied territory.		F	S	M		S	M		F	S	S	M	M	M
Employ combined arms forces in combat.				S	F	F	M		F	M	M	M	M	M
Employ combined arms forces in security operations.	F	S		F	S	S	M		M	M	M	M	M	M
Conduct stability operations.		M					S		S	M				S
Improve capability, capacity, and performance of foreign security forces (Security Force Assistance).			M	M			S		S	S			S	S
Conduct operations under uncertain security conditions.	F	S	F	M	S	M	M		S	M	M	S	S	S
Conduct an opposed egress or egress under uncertain security conditions.		F		F		M			S	M	M			
Operate against and/or recover from a large-scale biological hazard.		S			F	F	F		F	F	F	F	F	S
Operate against and/or recover from a large-scale chemical or nuclear hazard.		F			F	F	F		F	F	F	F	F	F
Sustain distributed military operations for extended periods		M	S	M	M		M	F	S	F			M	M

Key	
Most	Would apply in 50 percent or more instances of this operational type.
Some	Would apply in 25 to 49 percent of the instances of this operational type.
Few	Would apply in 6 to 24 percent of the instances of this operational type.
Blank	Does not apply, or would apply in 5 percent or less of the instances of this operational type.

2

FUTURE SUPPLY OF GROUND FORCE CAPABILITIES

Going forward, decisionmakers contemplating whether to engage in a given operation would likely include judgments about the availability of key capabilities in that process. While for ground-centric operations these would clearly include the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and special operations forces (SOF), the ability and willingness of allies to participate would also be assessed, as would the potential contributions of relevant civilian agencies.

Conceptually, capability has both a qualitative and quantitative dimension. Budget constraints facing the United States and many of its traditional allies are resulting in smaller ground forces in general, but operational lessons learned are also driving some qualitative shifts. The next section briefly describes the growing convergence between some of the United States' traditional and newer operational partners. The following section provides a brief overview of trends for U.S. ground forces. The last section describes the challenges facing many of the civilian agencies that might be called upon to contribute to future ground force operations. A more complete discussion of the capabilities covered in this chapter can be found at Appendix C.

Partner Nation Ground Force Capabilities

A key tenet of U.S. strategy is that we will seek to engage in future operations with international partners whenever possible.¹ Traditionally, a relatively small group of like-minded nations has demonstrated a repeated willingness to put forces alongside those of the United States. Many of these nations have highly sophisticated forces that are trained and equipped to engage in the most lethal operations. Most are also facing serious budgetary problems that are forcing them to reduce the overall size of their armed forces (ground forces in particular). These reductions are almost exclusively coming from the active rolls, though in some instances (e.g., the United Kingdom) they are accompanied by growth in reserve forces. Changes in perceptions of the strategic environment have also caused many nations to reorient their forces away from large-scale conventional conflicts with states, placing more emphasis on the challenges posed by irregular or nontraditional enemies. This includes increasing, or at least protecting, capabilities that support stability operations and security force assistance tasks.

Concurrent with this trend, the United States has recognized both the need and the opportunity to broaden its pool of potential operational partners. It is now a key element of U.S. defense strategy to develop deeper relationships with a wider range of nations. As a general statement, many of these nations have relatively nascent or small ground force capabilities that are typically lightly armed and designed to meet the minimum demands of securing national borders and providing internal security. Unlike many Western nations, however, a number of these countries

1. The White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, May 2010).

are expanding their strategic appetites and seeking to play a larger role in regional and global affairs. These include Brazil, South Africa, and Australia, among others. A number are increasing their defense investments, including in high-end special operations forces but also in more general purpose ground force capabilities. However, most are either a long way from or have no desire to build up large amounts of armored maneuver capability. Instead, in general, they are focusing on developing more capacity to project power within their own regions, enhancing their capabilities to withstand higher levels of violence, and improving their capacity for logistical support.

From the perspective of future partner contributions to ground force operations, the net result of these two trends could be characterized as a regression toward the mean. Many larger Western forces are shrinking, while smaller forces elsewhere in the world are growing. Higher-end Western capabilities are giving way to a more “middleweight” orientation, while growing regional powers are adding greater firepower.

U.S. Military Ground Force Capabilities

Though the future is still very much being written for U.S. ground forces, some decisions have already been made. As operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan decline, the Army and the Marine Corps together will eliminate up to 67,000 active duty service members by 2016. The Marine Corps has laid out a more explicit plan outlining qualitative changes in its future force that involve consolidating some headquarters, divesting some combat capability, and reorganizing logistics support, while increasing its investments in special operations and cyber capabilities. Marine Corps leaders have also emphasized the need to lighten the overall equipment inventory to preserve responsiveness, characterizing itself as a “middleweight force [that is] lighter than the Army, and heavier than SOF.”² Both services remain committed to preparing to operate across the full range of operational types, though the Marine Corps has restated its particular utility in crisis response.

Just as many of the nations that have contributed to operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are applying lessons learned from those conflicts by enhancing their capacity in security force assistance and stability operations, U.S. ground forces are debating how best to shore up those capabilities for the long term. A key characteristic of special operations forces is regional and cultural expertise, and the Army and Marine Corps both intend to enhance the capacity of their forces in this regard as well. Similarly, the Army in particular is deliberating how best to structure and prepare for stability operations and security force assistance tasks. Options range from the creation of units or organizations dedicated to those missions, to supporting small cadres of experts that could rapidly direct training and enhancements to general purpose forces, should large-scale demands emerge unexpectedly.

Unlike the so-called general purpose forces, special operations forces plan to continue past growth at a rate of 3 to 4 percent annually for at least the next five years.³ Looking forward, SOF is principally focused on continuing to conduct counter-network campaigns, and as capacity be-

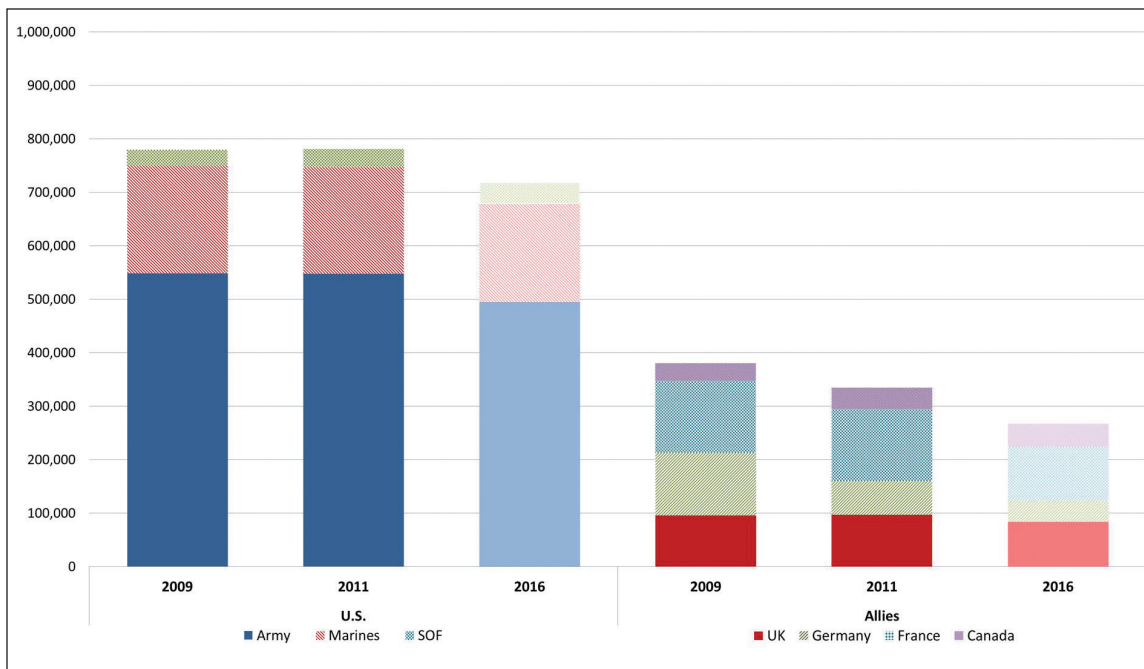
2. General James F. Amos, “Role of the United States Marine Corps,” Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington, DC, September 12, 2011, p. 2.

3. Admiral Eric Olson, “Posture Statement, U.S. Special Operations Command,” Statement before the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, March 1, 2011, www.socom.mil/Documents/2011%20SOCOM%20Posture%20Statement.pdf.

comes available (either through decreased commitments elsewhere or as the force grows), expanding its focus on foreign internal defense missions.

Figure 2 illustrates the aggregate numbers of active duty ground forces for the United States and four of its key allies—Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Allies have already begun to make ground force reductions, and more are planned. U.S. ground force levels have been steady or rising in recent years but, as discussed above, are projected to fall by 67,000 over the next five years. Collectively, by 2016, the United States and some of its key allies plan to cut their active duty ground forces by over 174,000, a 15 percent reduction from 2009 levels.

Figure 2: U.S. and Key Allies' Active Duty Ground Forces, 2009–2016



Source: Created by the CSIS New Defense Approaches Project based on data from *Jane's World Armies* and from the International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2011* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Notes: Graph represents active duty components for all ground forces. An increase in the United Kingdom's reserve component is expected to offset some of its planned active force reduction. U.S. SOF component reflects a 3 percent annual growth rate, as projected by the 2011 U.S. SOCOM Posture Statement.

U.S. Civilian Agency Contributions

Operational experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past decade have brought into high relief the need for civilian expertise in certain types of military operations. In recognition of this fact, new funding mechanisms and organizations have been established to increase both responsiveness and overall capacity, particularly for expertise resident in the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). While civilian augmentation of military-led operations that require stability-related tasks in particular remains important, in popular

conception these operations sometimes overshadow an equally vital but longer-standing set of operational types in which military forces are subordinate to civilian authorities. In the main, these include any mission that might be conducted domestically, from disaster relief to responding to a terrorist attack, as well as certain types of overseas operations.

While rhetorical support for “whole-of-government” operations remains strong, the budgetary foundation is weakening. The State Department, USAID, and even potentially the Federal Emergency Management Agency have already experienced or are anticipating real budgetary cuts that are in some instances significant. Congress is increasingly unwilling to support key enhancements to civilian agencies that would underwrite meaningful contingency response capabilities.⁴ And, initiatives in the State Department in particular that may seek to shore up these capabilities are unlikely to be resourced sufficiently to relieve ground forces of their implicit responsibilities for many nonmilitary stability operations tasks.⁵ While the ultimate outcome is unclear, as a general proposition it seems reasonable to expect that plans to expand civilian support to military-led foreign contingency operations are unlikely to be realized and, in fact, that such support may be reduced over the next decade.

On the whole, the brief overview of trends in partner and U.S. military ground force capabilities, and in expected civilian support, indicates the following:

- The collective ground force capacity of the United States and its key allies is falling, though some future shortfalls could be offset by regional partners when applicable.
- Special operations capabilities are robust and growing, both in the United States and with many potential partners and friends.
- With allied armored forces shrinking significantly, U.S. armored capabilities are becoming increasingly unique.
- Partner nations’ ground force capabilities are increasingly converging toward middleweight forces with regional, rather than global, reach.
- Given the likely decline of resources in other U.S. government agencies, deployed ground forces will still perform many nonmilitary stability operations tasks.

4. Susan Epstein et al., “Fact Sheet: The FY2012 State and Foreign Operations Budget Request,” Report R41680, Congressional Research Service, March 9, 2011, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41680.pdf>.

5. Nicole Gaouette, “State Department Plans Cuts in Security Funding, Aid,” Bloomberg, February 14, 2011, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-02-14/state-department-s-47-billion-budget-would-cut-some-security-aid-funds.html>.

3

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The overview of the future presented in Chapter 1 confirms the analysis of so many others: the future security environment will be complex and uncertain, and highly variable. Examining the implications of that environment for ground force operations in particular, and then comparing those findings with trends in the aggregate supply of ground force capabilities, suggest at least five areas in which a misalignment either exists or could be introduced as policymakers consider how to apply budgetary cuts of a-yet-uncertain magnitude. A more fulsome discussion of the detail behind these findings can be found in Appendixes A through C. But, in brief, the following are identified as current or potential misalignments:

- **Lower demand for stability operations capabilities.** This finding acknowledges that existing specialized and general purpose forces will need to both provide security during future stabilization efforts and continue filling significant gaps in civilian contingency capability (U.S. and foreign partner militaries are also preserving supply in this area). However, based on an analysis of contingency requirements, we conclude that future demand may be overstated and that the forces required for stability operations are either sufficient and ready or sufficiently adaptable to meet the immediate stabilization needs associated with most contingency types. In addition, foreign partners are likelier to commit their finite ground force capabilities to more benign stabilization efforts than they are to contribute to more intense combat actions. As a result, a more expansive stability operations capability for larger and/or longer contingency demands might be better positioned in the U.S. reserve components (which might also contain more relevant expertise and thus be more effective).
- **Lower demand for security force assistance capabilities.** Again, these capabilities will be needed, but will likely represent a smaller proportion of overall contingency demands than conventional wisdom suggests. As in the case of stability operations, supply is being preserved both in U.S. and allied militaries, and partners' willingness to support security force assistance under more benign circumstances may be more likely than commitments of combat forces. Finally, demands for security force assistance capabilities will likely be more evident over time than they will under exigent contingency conditions.
- **Greater demand for capabilities that support strategic responsiveness.** The uncertainty of the future environment and the likelihood that many ground force contingencies will emerge with very little strategic warning, place a high premium on ground forces that can rapidly deploy and operate effectively with very little strategic notice and little or no requirement to stage and reconfigure before initiating follow-on operations. Thus, demand both for responsive ground forces and the joint capabilities (e.g., air and sea lift) enabling their timely deployment will be high. Others' supply, in this regard, is limited and, from a global perspective, likely diminishing. And, current U.S. capacity could be further strained by reductions in forward-deployed forces, as well as any potential reductions in overseas prepositioned stocks.

- **Greater demand for forcible entry capabilities.** Demand is high in this case because forcible entry capabilities are more broadly applicable than many perceive. The United States maintains much of the likely supply among a broader community of allies and partners. Current levels may be adequate, but if an under-appreciation of the potential demand leads to substantial reductions in forcible entry capabilities and forces either in the Marine Corps or in the Army, future decisionmakers' options could be greatly reduced. This also applies to careful consideration of the entire family of joint enablers that underwrite the U.S. capability for forcible entry (e.g., amphibious shipping, suppression of enemy air defenses, counter-mine capabilities, and strategic and operational airlift).
- **Greater demand for armored maneuver capabilities.** As in the case of forcible entry above, based on their broad applicability across multiple operational types, demand for armored maneuver capabilities (e.g., armored- and armor-protected infantry and tanks) is higher than is popularly conceived. However, aggregate supply in this area is falling. Many traditional U.S. allies are shedding some armored capabilities in favor of greater flexibility and lower cost. The U.S. Army faces likely cuts of uncertain magnitude to armored capabilities. And, the U.S. Marine Corps' force structure review resulted in elimination of two tank companies.

This finding should not be interpreted as an endorsement of a postwar ground force reorientation on large-scale conventional conflict, however. Indeed, the environments under which these capabilities will be employed are substantially different than anticipated prior to 9/11, and major conventional campaigns may now be the lesser included case for ground forces relative to many other operational types. Nonetheless, capabilities like armored maneuver that are essential to success in a major combat campaign are also essential to ground force success in a whole range of other more likely operations. This recommendation should not be interpreted as any type of commentary about the number, type, or apportionment of specific armored capabilities that should be resident in the force. Current capabilities may be adequate, or even too large. The point, however, is that armored maneuver capabilities are more broadly relevant than many currently envision.

Conclusion

As noted in Chapter 1, an interpretation of the findings above as reflecting a vision more in line with the past than the future would represent a failure on the part of the authors to adequately express their thoughts. While some of the conclusions echo refrains that have been heard before, they are thoroughly anchored in a dispassionate review of the future. Ironically, a desire to “talk anew” about that future may override objective attempts to “think anew.” This would be a strategic error of great magnitude.

It is apparent from the work underwriting this study that U.S. ground forces are relevant and useful to a variety of contingency demands and increasingly unique when compared to the capabilities of U.S. allies and partners. Additionally, ground forces will likely be in greater demand over the next 10 years than many expect. There is an abiding need for the United States to maintain the capacity to rapidly project sufficient ground forces under a variety of crisis conditions to affect favorable outcomes on its terms; failure to do so will likely place clear limitations on future contingency options. Further, defense policymakers should also not shy from acknowledging that armored capabilities remain useful, not for the same reasons as they have been in the past, but

because of their broad utility in meeting challenges the United States will almost certainly face going forward. Finally, policymakers should not overcorrect for the errors of the past by institutionalizing large-scale capabilities that go beyond likely needs in the areas of stability operations and security force assistance. Hedging against that risk might have been possible in an earlier era, but the opportunity costs in an era of defense austerity are too high to warrant this approach.

More generally, the conclusions above are intended to help inform calculations about the relative utility of investments in (or reductions to) different kinds of ground force capabilities. The analysis is also relevant, however, to the broader trades across the full portfolio of defense capabilities, ground forces or otherwise. If, as many suggest, the United States needs to reorient on Asia strategically, the success of an Asia-focused strategy is predicated, at least in part, on ensuring that conflicts in other parts of the world remain manageable. Ground forces have a substantial and critical role to play in that regard, and a strategy that fails to acknowledge that reality will be incomplete.



APPENDIXES

A. Operational Types and their Characteristics

<http://csis.org/program/us-ground-force-capabilities-through-2020>.

B. Key Task Definitions

<http://csis.org/program/us-ground-force-capabilities-through-2020>.

C. The Supply of Future Ground Force Capabilities

<http://csis.org/program/us-ground-force-capabilities-through-2020>.

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