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The Army's AimPoint Force Structure Initiative

Background

The 2018 National Military Strategy describes how the U.S. military is to defend the homeland and retain its competitive advantage to deter competitors and defeat adversaries, whether great power competitors like China and Russia or other security challenges. It is a fundamental departure from other National Military Strategies post-September 11, which focused on counterinsurgency and defeating violent extremist organizations. In essence, the 2018 National Military Strategy refocuses the Army from fighting counterinsurgencies and violent extremist organizations to countering and possibly confronting Russian and Chinese military forces. The Army's new AimPoint initiative is intended to be the means to build the force structure needed to implement this new focus.

Previous Army Force Structure Construct

During the Cold War, the U.S. Army was primarily a division-centric force whereby divisions, consisting of a mix of specialized brigades, battalions, and companies, were the primary warfighting organization. Within the division, the commander controlled a variety of assets such as artillery, engineers, and logistical units that could be assigned to subordinate infantry or armored brigades as the tactical situation required. Divisions were part of corps, which also had their own organic units such as artillery and engineers that the corps commander could allocate to divisions to support operations.

In the early 2000s, as the Army became committed to long-term counterinsurgency combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army units would rotate in and out of these theaters on an annual basis. Based on observations of how these rotations affected soldiers and units, Army leadership determined that the division-centric force was not the best structure to support a rotational force.

In September 2003, the U.S. Army began converting from an organization centered on divisions (numbering from 10,000 to 18,000 soldiers) to a force based upon brigade combat teams (BCTs) of around 4,000 soldiers. This new brigade-centric force, known as the *modular force*, assigned a number of division-level assets to the newly formed BCTs, thereby lessening the operational and tactical roles of the division.

Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)

According to the Army, current conventional warfighting doctrine is still largely based on the Air-Land Battle concept developed in 1981 to counter Warsaw Pact forces in Europe. As the name indicates, Air-Land Battle is primarily based on operations in the air and land domains. However, competitors now possess increasingly capable

anti-access and area denial strategies, meant to separate the Joint Force physically and functionally and alliances politically. Furthermore, near-peer competitors are capable of securing strategic objectives by means other than armed conflict with the United States and its allies. More importantly, the Army can no longer guarantee dominance over a near-peer threat—an advantage that the United States has held for decades. Unlike Air-Land Battle, MDO addresses the notion that competition and conflict occur in multiple domains (land, air, sea, cyber, and space), and that there will be multiple threats across the competition continuum in the future operating environment. As the MDO concept continues to be refined and updated, it will likely drive Army modernization and force structure. The Army aims to achieve a full MDO capability by 2035.

Conceptually, the Army, as an element of the Joint Force, plans to conduct MDO (not necessarily in every domain at each moment), primarily by deterrence, in order to prevail in competition. If deterrence fails, and if it becomes necessary, Army forces would penetrate and disable enemy anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) systems and, if successful, exploit any resulting freedom of maneuver to achieve strategic objectives and force a return to competition on favorable terms.

Major Aspects of AimPoint Force Structure Initiative

The primary means by which the Army intends to build its MDO capability is through what it calls the AimPoint Force Structure Initiative. According to the Army, the AimPoint Force being developed by the Army Futures Command's (AFC's) Army Futures and Concepts Center is to be a flexible force structure. While little change is expected at brigade level and below, the Army suggests major changes will occur at higher echelons—division, corps, and theater command—that have primarily played a supporting role in counterinsurgency operations such as in Iraq and Afghanistan. Under MDO, higher field headquarters will now be required to take the lead in coordinating large-scale campaigns against well-armed nation-states such as Russia and China. The Army also notes that the AimPoint Force will be resource-informed, meaning it will be subject to budget constraints and political considerations. Because of the geographic distinctions between the European and Indo-Pacific theaters, individual higher-echelon AimPoint formation force structure will likely differ by theater as opposed to current one-size-fits-all units.

Major Proposed Force Structure Initiatives

The following sections provide a description of some of AimPoint's major proposed force structure changes.

Division, Corps, and Theater Level

The Army notes that over the past 20 to 30 years, the capacity to conduct campaigns at the division, corps, and theater level was “mortgaged” (i.e., assets and units at these levels were assigned to BCTs). Under AimPoint, headquarters at these levels are being developed and existing ones modified to build back a campaign capability (i.e., adding additional staff, specialists, capabilities, and units) to compete with near-peer adversaries and to employ information warfare and operate in the cyber and space domains.

As part of AimPoint, the Army announced on February 11, 2020, the activation of a fourth corps headquarters, designated Fifth Corps (V Corps), which is to be located at Fort Knox, KY. The V Corps Headquarters is to consist of approximately 635 soldiers, of which approximately 200 will support a rotational operational command post in Europe. The V Corps Headquarters is projected to be operational by fall 2020.

The Army also plans under AimPoint to develop an unknown number of new Theater Fires Commands intended to coordinate long-range fires of Army missile and extended-range artillery systems and units presently under development.

Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTF)

To facilitate the conduct of MDO, under AimPoint, the Army is currently creating three Multi-Domain Task Forces (MDTF). Based on a Field Artillery (FA) brigade and augmented with an intelligence, information operations, cyber, electronic warfare and space (I2CEWS) detachment, the first MDTF was established as a pilot program in 2017 and assigned to U.S. Army Pacific Command, where it participated in a number of exercises and training events. MDTFs focus on penetrating an enemy environment, employing assets that can counter enemy A2/AD capabilities and enemy network-focused targeting of U.S. units.

In 2021, the Army plans to establish a second stand-alone MDTF in Europe that is to merge the 41st FA Brigade with an I2CEWS element. In 2022, a third task force, which is yet to be determined, would stand up in the Pacific. The Army envisions MDTFs to comprise about 500 personnel, including personnel from other services.

Long-Range Artillery and Missiles

Also under the auspices of AFC and AimPoint, the Army is developing long-range precision fires units and systems. Systems under development include a new Precision Strike Missile, or PrSM, which will employ current launchers and is to be capable of achieving greater ranges than current systems. The Army is also developing an Extended Range Cannon Artillery (ERCA) system. The ERCA is said to be an improvement to the current M109A7 Paladin self-propelled howitzer that provides indirect fires for BCTs and at the division-level. The Army is also reportedly in the early stages of developing and testing a Strategic, Long-Range Cannon to augment the ERCA. The Army's goal for the Strategic, Long-Range Cannon is to be able to successfully engage targets out to 1,000 nautical miles. If

successfully developed and fielded, these systems would either be deployed to existing units or new units would be created to accommodate these new weapon systems.

Potential Issues for Congress

Potential issues for Congress include but not limited to the following:

New Requirements for Headquarters and Specialized Units

While AimPoint is described as a flexible initiative, the Army has noted that most of the change will occur above BCT level. What are the new requirements for headquarters envisioned by the Army in terms of types and estimated numbers of headquarters? In terms of specialized units, apart from reestablishing V Corps and three currently planned MDTFs, what are some of the other types of specialized units (e.g., artillery, missile, air and missile defense, intelligence) that the Army envisions developing under AimPoint ?

Overseas Stationing of Units

The Army reportedly has stated that it “needs an enhanced posture forward in both INDOPACOM and in Europe—nothing like the 1980s, but larger than what we have now.” What are both the types and numbers of units by region being developed under AimPoint that the Army plans to be forward-deployed? Will these deployments be rotational or permanent home-station deployments?

Estimated Costs

The Army's AimPoint is arguably an ambitious effort intended to be completed by 2035. What are the Army's estimated costs in terms of personnel, equipment, operations and maintenance, and military construction (MILCON) associated with this effort over this period?

Adequacy of Global Command, Control, Communications, Computers, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (C4ISR)

MDO and AimPoint units such as MDTFs have been characterized as requiring linkage to national C4ISR, space, cyber, and information warfare assets, as well as the other Services and allies. Given this dependency, will the planned Global C4ISR Network be adequate to meet the needs of MDO and new and existing units designated for Europe and INDOPACOM?

Applicability to other National Security Challenges

As previously noted, MDO and AimPoint units and systems are intended to compete with and, if necessary, confront and defeat great power competitors Russia and China. Some defense experts suggest that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. national security construct as it stands could be in question and the Services could face appreciable force structure and budgetary reductions. Given this potential shift in national security focus, how applicable are MDO and the units being developed under the auspices of AimPoint to other national security challenges including potential future pandemic situations?

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