

Aligning Strategy With Structure

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Readiness and Alignment

The U.S. Army is continuously evolving to meet global security and defense needs while also maintaining strategic force structure, equipment, and force readiness at its core. Driven by the directives of the national strategic documents, the U.S. Army ensures that the force sustains operational readiness and alignment with national defense priorities, as exemplified by the integration of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) capabilities in response to emerging threats. The integration of the strategic documents with force structure through the frameworks of the Total Army Analysis (TAA) and the Planning, Programming, Budgeting, and Execution (PPBE) processes demonstrates the Army commitment to maintaining preparedness and readiness in the face of global security challenges, such as the Syrian chemical weapons crisis.

Influence of Strategic Documents

Maintaining Army preparedness and readiness is dependent on the depth of strategic planning. Extensive planning leads to an understanding of how the national strategic documents align personnel strength and budgeting with the needs of combatant commanders. The three national strategic documents and their distinct purposes are—

- National Security Strategy (NSS)¹—addresses national security concerns and outlines the President's strategies for managing the issues.
- National Defense Strategy (NDS)²—presents the Department of Defense approach to executing the directives of the President's NSS. The joint chiefs of staff review and update the NDS every 4 years.
- National Military Strategy (NMS)³—is a collaborative effort between the joint chiefs of staff and the combatant commanders; it outlines military intentions to achieve the objectives delineated in the NSS and NDS.⁴

Processes

The national strategic documents shape the TAA and PPBE processes, guiding the Army to meet national defense priorities.

TAA Process

The TAA process is the basis for analyzing current threats. It is essential to examine and determine the future

force composition of the Army in alignment with national security priorities and evolving threats. The implementation phase of the TAA process involves modifying the organization, personnel, and equipment while continuously supervising alignment with strategic objectives. The repetitive nature of the TAA process enables continuous adaptations to ensure that the Army is prepared for imminent challenges.⁵

PPBE Process

The PPBE process aligns the Army budgeting and resource allocation with the national strategic objectives, ensuring a clear approach from planning to execution.⁶ The process begins with providing strategic guidance through defense policies and advances through a programming phase that turns that strategic guidance into systematic decisions. The programming phase concludes with the development of the program objective memorandum, a document that outlines a 5-year plan for resource allocation.⁷ Next, during the budgeting phase, the budget estimate submission is prepared for the upcoming fiscal year, ensuring that financial planning aligns with Army strategic and operational goals.⁸ The strategic alignment between documents and processes emphasizes the importance of a proactive approach to readiness.

Force Structure and Personnel Management

Strategic alignment ensures Army readiness for present and future challenges, allowing the NSS and NDS to operationalize national defense principles into tangible force readiness and structure, with oversight provided by Army operations, plans, and training.⁹ The Army manages its personnel strength through a detailed and dynamic process, ensuring that once the force is correctly sized and configured, it remains ready, resilient, and capable of countering current and future threats. The assistant chief of staff, personnel (G-1) is responsible for personnel management. After appropriately configuring the force, the G-1 reviews policies that affect distribution, such as operational priorities, initial entry training, and professional development. It also actively shapes retention strategies to preserve a robust and ready force. By implementing career development programs, the G-1 ensures that Soldiers have clear advancement paths that match their occupation specialty and skill levels.¹⁰

A core component of the force structure and personnel management process is the Army Organizational Life Cycle Model, which guides unit development, deployment, maintenance, and eventual decommissioning. It includes structuring units through the table of organization and equipment (TOE) and the modified table of organization and equipment (MTOE), which define the specific personnel and equipment necessary for each unit to fulfill its mission.¹¹ These documents outline required personnel roles, equipment, and organizational configurations, directing the allocation of resources to increase readiness, achieve immediate objectives, and establish future strategic ambitions.

Syrian Chemical Weapons Crisis

In 2013, the Syrian civil war tested the strategic ambitions of the U.S. Army. The principles outlined in the national strategic documents underwent critical scrutiny as the Army applied strategic and operational insights in response to the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime, which resulted in the death of 1,400 Ghouta victims by exposure to sarin.¹² The crisis highlighted the need for a CBRN response capability shaped by strategic guidance and integrated within the broader Army structure (ARSTRUC). The adaptation of CBRN units in response to this emerging threat reinforced the ability of the Army to rapidly recalibrate its capabilities to align with strategic priorities, ensuring that it remains prepared to address the challenges posed by the use of chemical weapons. The Syrian chemical weapons crisis illustrated the critical relationship between strategic planning, personnel strength, and the development of specialized capabilities to meet specific threats.

Preparing for Weapons of Mass Destruction

The Syrian chemical weapons crisis provided a connection between planning and the need for a detailed examination of how strategic document integration and manpower management address the challenges of countering weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The 2023 Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction outlines objectives and priorities for the U.S. military in preventing the proliferation and use of WMDs, including CBRN weapons.¹³ This strategic document influences the structuring and readiness of Army CBRN units, guiding the TAA and PPBE processes to ensure the adequate staffing, equipping, and preparation of these units. The personnel development system within the Army ensures that CBRN Soldiers receive the necessary training and education to effectively perform their duties, highlighting the importance of aligning force structure management with strategic priorities.¹⁴

Countering WMD

The alarming use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime during the tumultuous Syrian civil war further demonstrated the necessity for a well-prepared force structure capable of responding to WMD threats.¹⁵ The Syrian chemical weapons crisis prompted the U.S. Army to urgently reassess its CBRN capabilities and overall readiness to confront such

challenges. The Army took significant steps to enhance its response framework.

The organizational framework of the Army, supported by ARTRUC guidelines, facilitated the development and training of specialized CBRN units. The ARSTRUC achieves strategic objectives, particularly in addressing unconventional threats such as WMD. Organizing, training, and deploying forces to manage various challenges are essential tasks facilitated by ARSTRUC alignment.¹⁶ Adhering to ARSTRUC guidelines ensures the flexibility of Army units to confront impending threats. Training Soldiers in advanced technical and leadership skills directly supports the national defense strategies by tackling and mitigating WMD risks. Continuous training and development programs prepare personnel for rapid deployment and effective action. The TOE and MTOE identify the skills and equipment necessary for Army units. These organizational frameworks and guidelines are instrumental in preparing a force for traditional combat scenarios and responding to CBRN incidents, aligning with the multidimensional readiness emphasized in the NDS.¹⁷

During the 2014–2016 Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa, the Army deployed personnel with specialized training in medical treatment, biohazard containment, and logistics under Operation United Assistance, demonstrating adaptability to biological threats.¹⁸ The readiness and adaptability associated with Operation United Assistance emphasized the Army commitment to the goals of the NDS and the importance of a well-prepared military in responding to global health emergencies and WMD threats, and the success of the operation validated the ARSTRUC.

Conclusion

The integration of the NSS, NDS, and NMS with force structure management through the frameworks of the TAA and PPBE demonstrates the Army commitment to maintaining readiness and preparedness in the face of global security challenges, such as the Syrian chemical weapons crisis. The Army remains resilient and capable by aligning force structure and resource allocation with national defense priorities and adapting to emerging threats. The proactive preparation of CBRN units and the challenges met during the Syrian civil war highlight the critical importance of strategic planning and operational flexibility. The Army commitment to continuous assessment and adaptation will remain fundamental in safeguarding national security and contributing to global stability.

Endnotes:

¹*National Security Strategy*, the White House, Washington, D.C., 12 October 2022.

²*2022 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, U.S. Department of Defense, 27 October 2022.

³*National Military Strategy—2022*, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2022.

⁴*2021–2022: How the Army Runs—A Senior Leader Reference Handbook*, U.S. Army, 31 October 2022.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Kenneth D. Ward, “Syria, Russia, and the Global Chemical Weapons Crisis,” September 2021, <<https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2021-09/features/syria-russia-global-chemical-weapons-crisis>>, accessed on 2 October 2024.

¹³*Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction*, U.S. Department of Defense, 2023.

¹⁴2021–2022: How the Army Runs—A Senior Leader Reference Handbook.

¹⁵Ward.

¹⁶2021–2022: How the Army Runs—A Senior Leader Reference Handbook.

¹⁷*Strategy for Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction*.

¹⁸*Operation UNITED ASSISTANCE: The DOD Response to Ebola in West Africa, Joint and Coalition Operational Analysis*, 6 January 2016.

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