

# Ctrl+Alt+Delete

## Resetting America's Military

BY SHAWN BRIMLEY AND PAUL SCHARRE

**Today's U.S. military is the product of history—not of the missions and threats it now faces. American forces are hampered by overlapping roles and missions, arcane organizational structures, Cold War platforms and programs, and recruiting practices detached from modern needs. If it were starting fresh, this is not the military the United States would build.**

The hard truth is that inertia, not strategy, is the main force shaping the military. Major weapons programs take decades to develop and are nearly impossible to kill. Promising new technologies and concepts never see the light of day if they threaten traditional approaches. Byzantine bureaucracies comprising dozens of overlapping command structures stifle innovation, slow response time, and create needless barriers. Recruiting and retention processes designed in the 1970s frustrate many military personnel who expect a 21st-century employer.

What if we could start from scratch? What might the U.S. military look like if we hit Ctrl+Alt+Delete and reset the force? Would we establish a separate Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps? Would we give them the overlapping capabilities—planes and helicopters, commandos and cyberspace units—that they have today? Would we give regional commanders the power of veritable viceroys?

As budgets tighten, other powers rise, and technologies proliferate, it is time to stop and ask: Is there a better way? What follows is a thought experiment about what the U.S. military might look like if we started today with a blank slate.

In our vision, the military would be organized around its three overarching missions: defend the homeland, defeat adversaries, and maintain a stabilizing presence abroad—themes that run through defense strategy documents over the last quarter-century, regardless of presidential administration. In a revolutionary break from current practice, these new commands would be responsible not only for executing these core missions, but also for developing the capabilities to achieve them. We would invest more in robotics systems of all kinds, protect existing special operations and cyberspace capabilities, and reduce less relevant capabilities like short-range aircraft and tanks.

The military's personnel system would also be reformed to meet modern needs. New recruitment tools would allow the hiring of midcareer professionals who have skills in key areas, like cybersecurity and economic development. Personnel

contracts would be revamped to eliminate the element of conscription that remains in today's "all-volunteer force": Young people volunteer to join the military, but once they do, they can't leave—and they can even be kept in past the end of their contracts under the "stop-loss" policy. We would institute a true volunteer force, whereby those in uniform would owe a certain amount of time to the military based on training received. If they chose to leave early—which they would be free to do—they would have to reimburse the government for the cost of the training they had acquired at taxpayer expense.

Career trajectories would be modified to emphasize flexibility. Service members would compete for jobs within an internal market, giving both commanders and individuals more control over assignments. And the military's anachronistic class division into officers and enlisted personnel, more suitable for 18th-century Britain than 21st-century America, would be redefined. No corporation that placed 22-year-old college graduates directly into middle management could survive, and we would institute a more sensible leadership model based on experience and ability.

Of course, there is no magic button to erase the laws, culture, and history that have shaped the military into what it is today. But with wars ending, resources declining, and new threats emerging, now is the time to consider reform. These ideas are only an exercise, but policies, bureaucracies, and laws can change. The military underwent major reforms after World War II with the creation of the Department of Defense, after the Vietnam War with the establishment of the all-volunteer force, and in the 1980s under the Goldwater-Nichols reforms. The question is not whether the U.S. military should change for the future, but how it should change and whether it can do so in time—before the next war. ♦

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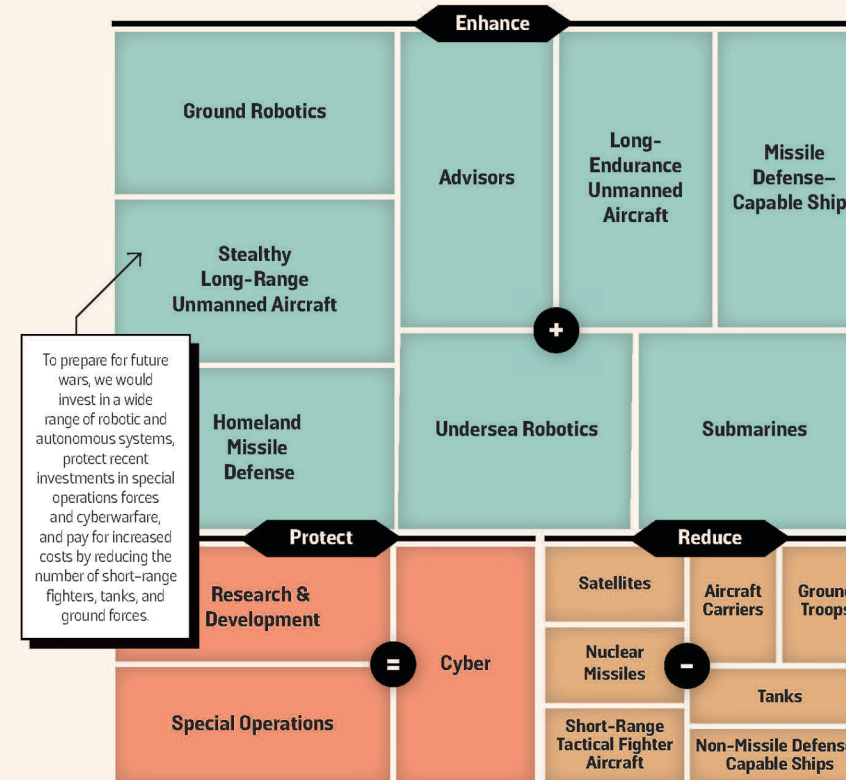


# A New U.S. Military, by Design

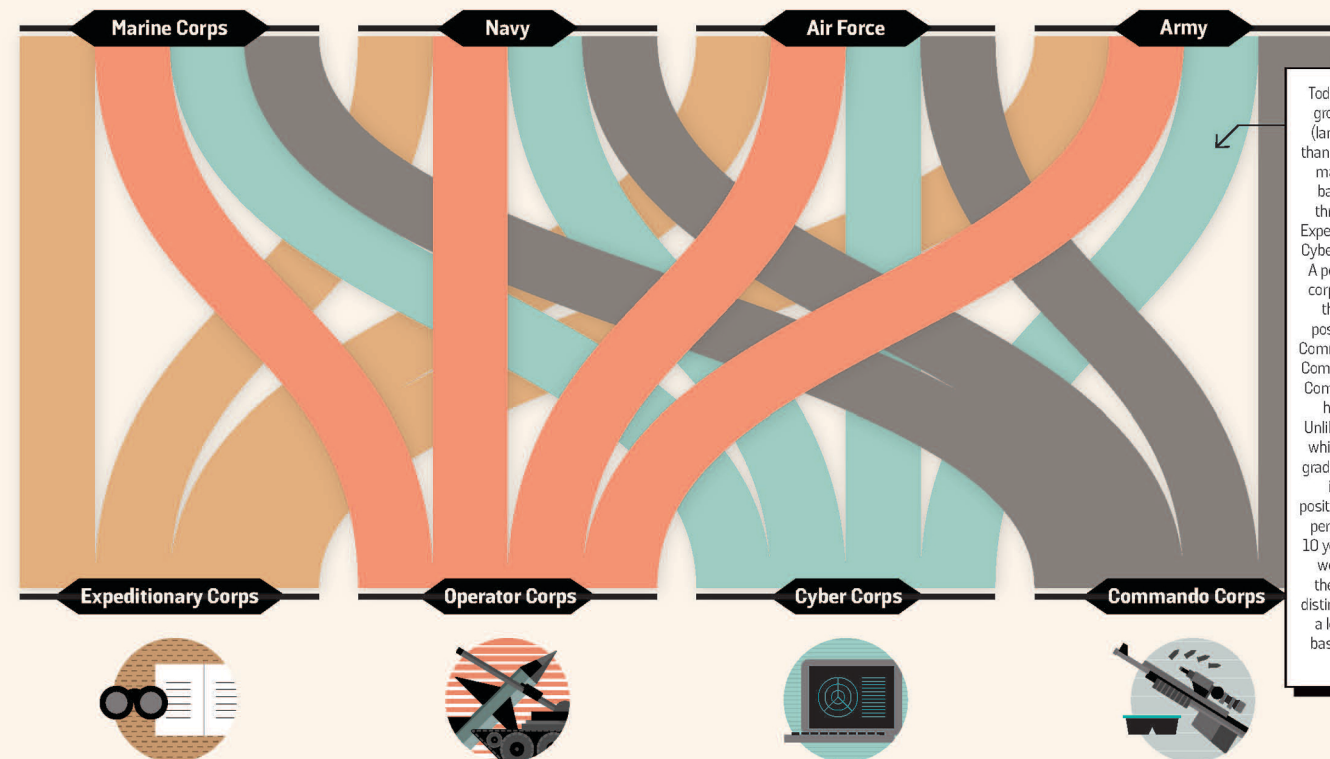
INFOGRAPHIC BY VALERIO PELLEGRINI

You'd be hard-pressed to find someone who understands all the intricacies of the U.S. military: each layer of bureaucracy; the relationships among every service, command, and office; the nature of every program. It's more than any one head can hold—and difficult to capture succinctly in words. (Perhaps that's why the Pentagon relies so heavily on PowerPoint.) So, to present Shawn Brimley and Paul Scharre's concept for a military built from scratch, FP's editors opted to show, not just tell. This visualization illustrates the key elements of the authors' full-scale redesign and underscores its stark contrast with the status quo. It's amazing what you can do with a blank slate. ♦

## REBALANCE CAPABILITIES FOR FUTURE THREATS



## REORGANIZE PERSONNEL BY SKILL SET



Civil affairs specialists, linguists, and cultural and intelligence experts whose primary job is to engage with partners and allies abroad.

The operators of ships, submarines, tanks, and aircraft. Unlike the Commando Corps, physical strength would be less important than understanding the technical attributes of these highly complex weapons systems.

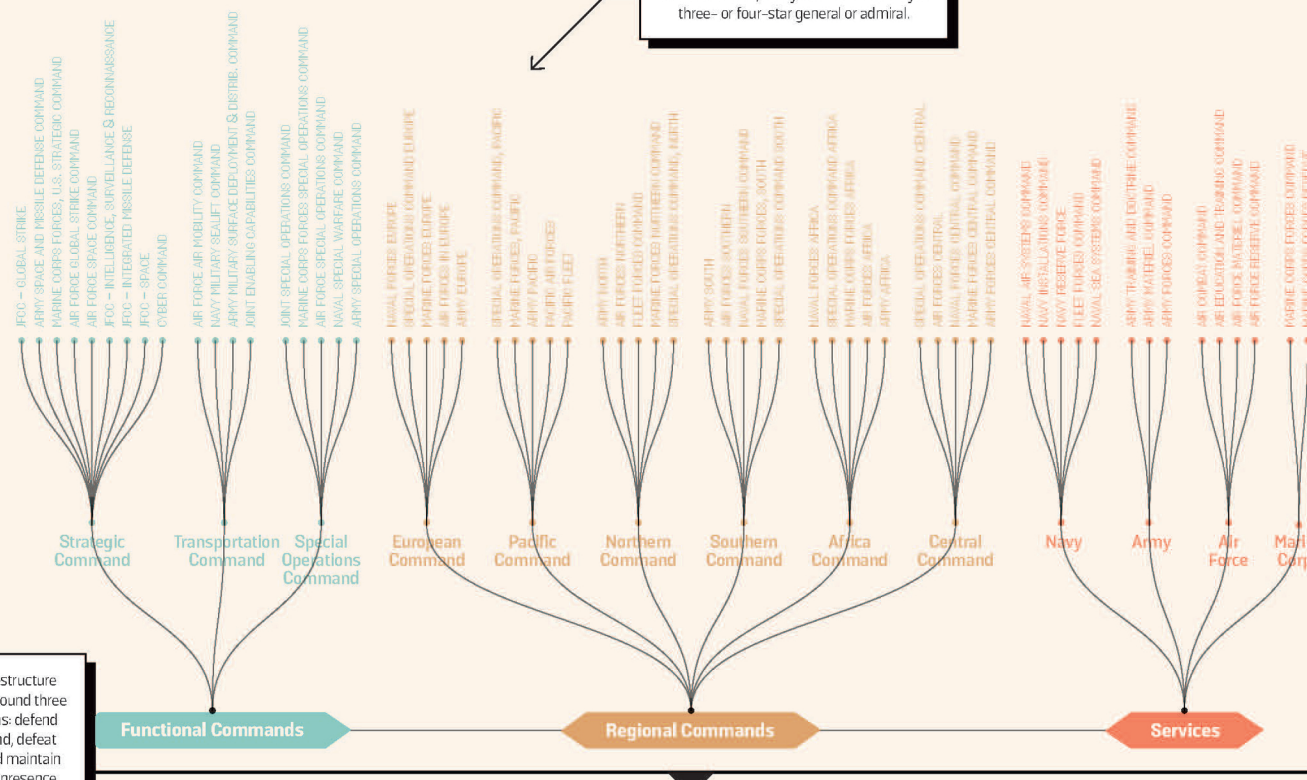
Mathematicians, computer programmers, and electronic-warfare specialists to defend U.S. digital infrastructure and attack the enemy if necessary.

Airborne and amphibious commandos and infantry to perform jobs such as crisis response, securing loose weapons of mass destruction, and counterterrorism.

Unlike today's military services, the corps would not own forces but would only manage personnel, who would be assigned under each of the three operational commands. Standards for recruiting, physical fitness, education, and even ideal personality traits would vary among them.

Today, individuals are grouped by domain (land, sea, air) rather than skill set. We would manage personnel based on skill sets through four corps: Expeditionary, Operator, Cyber, and Commando. A person would join a corps and then move through different positions in Defense Command, Global Strike Command, or Presence Command throughout his or her career. Unlike today's system, which thrusts college graduates immediately into leadership positions above enlisted personnel with six to 10 years of experience, we would redefine the enlisted-officer distinction and institute a leadership model based on experience and ability.

## SIMPLIFY COMMAND STRUCTURE



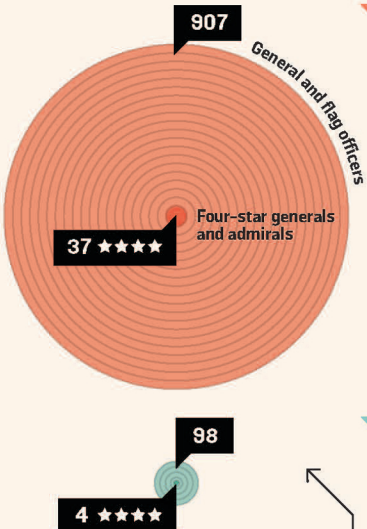
Today's U.S. military consists of nine commands that employ forces and four services that separately organize, train, and equip those forces. In addition, each of the commands and services has multiple subcommands, many of which are led by a three- or four-star general or admiral.

We would restructure the military around three core missions: defend the homeland, defeat enemies, and maintain a stabilizing presence abroad. In a dramatic shift, the commanders responsible for these missions would also build the forces to execute them, drawing personnel from the corps described on the next page.

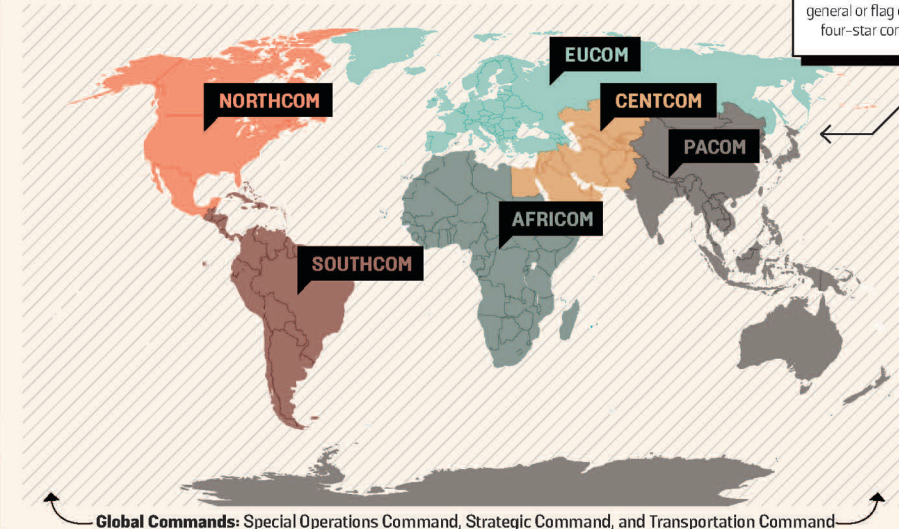


Today's regional commanders are powerful actors who have disproportionate influence over U.S. foreign policy. To subordinate military activities to diplomacy, we would eliminate the existing regional commands. Instead, in peacetime, forces stationed overseas would operate under the State Department's "chief of mission" authority and report through Presence Command. Regional activities would be coordinated by a two-star general or flag officer, not a four-star commander.

## Reduce General and Flag Officers



## Eliminate Current Regional Commands



"Brass creep" has resulted in a top-heavy military. We would have only four 4-star officers: the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the heads of the three new commands. The number of other general and flag officers, as well as civilian executives, would be reduced proportionately.