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FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2025

## Endangered species

Attack helicopters,  
generals, HQs on  
chopping block **Page 2**



**The Army would fly fewer AH-64 Apache attack helicopters under plans being considered.**

JOSEPH KUMZAK/U.S. Army



## COVER STORY

# Generals, HQs, helos on chopping block

## Defense secretary seeks leaner, more lethal US Army

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

The Army will cut 1,000 jobs from its main headquarters, shrink attack helicopter formations and lighten the load for infantry brigades, the service's top leaders said in a message to the force April 30.

A letter sent to Army commands recently details a series of changes to force structure in line with a directive issued the day before by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

"This initiative will reexamine all requirements and eliminate unnecessary ones, ruthlessly prioritize fighting formations to directly contribute to lethality, and empower leaders at echelon to make hard calls to ensure resources align with strategic objectives," Army Chief of Staff Gen. Randy George and Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll wrote in the joint letter.

A second round of initiatives will be announced in the coming months, the two Army leaders said.

In his memorandum to the Army, Hegseth directed Army leaders to streamline force structure and overcome "parochial interests" to rebuild the military's largest branch.

"To build a leaner, more lethal force, the Army must transform at an accelerated pace by divesting outdated, redundant, and inefficient programs, as well as restructuring headquarters and acquisition systems," Hegseth wrote.

The memo called for shedding weapons and units that have long been part of its identity.

It said the Army would reduce manned attack helicopter formations and augment those units with "inexpensive drone swarms capable of overwhelming adversaries." It would trim armor units, he said.

Top priorities also include improving long-range precision fire and building a "Golden Dome" program intended to serve as a missile defense shield for the homeland.

The defense secretary also said the



JUSTIN ASHAW/U.S. Army

**Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has directed the Army to reduce and restructure manned attack helicopter formations and augment them with inexpensive drone swarms, among other measures outlined in a memo issued April 30.**

Army will reduce general officer positions in a manner that streamlines command structures "for the warfighter." He didn't detail how many general officer slots will be abolished.

Hegseth followed his letter with a memorandum on Monday directing the Defense Department to cut at least 20% of its four-star generals and admirals, along with other reductions across the military.

In addition, he called for cuts of at least 20% of general officers in the National Guard and at least 10% of its general and flag officers across the military, which could include one-stars or above.

The Army's own letter highlighted the Army Transformation Initiative, part of a plan to prepare soldiers for a battlefield where drones and emerging technologies are expected to dominate.

"Sensors and decoys are everywhere," the letter said. "Dual-use technologies are continuously evolving and

outpacing our processes to defeat them. To maintain our edge on the battlefield, our Army will transform to a leaner, more lethal force by adapting how we fight, train, organize, and buy equipment."

At the tactical level, that means incorporating more drones into combat unit formations and putting less emphasis on manned aircraft.

To that end, the Army will reduce one aerial cavalry squadron per aviation brigade in the active component, George and Driscoll said. It also will consolidate aviation sustainment requirements.

Ground units will be adapted as well. All infantry brigade combat teams will be converted to mobile brigade combat teams, resulting in a leaner formation, according to the letter.

"We are trading weight for speed, and mass for decisive force," it said.

The letter didn't specify what the exact changes to brigade configura-



PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN/Stars and Stripes

**In the memorandum, Hegseth ordered a broad restructuring of the Army. His directive calls for an improvement of long-range precision artillery fire.**

tions would look like.

However, trading weight and mass for speed means that such units are likely to have fewer tanks and other armored vehicles.

The changes center on organizing the Army to more effectively counter China in the Indo-Pacific, which is the Pentagon's top priority. As part of the force structure overhaul, soldier rotations to the Pacific are expected to increase.

The Army leaders also reiterated some of the changes announced by Hegseth, including the merger of Army Futures Command and Training and Doctrine Command into one headquarters.

That "aligns force generation, force design, and force development under a single headquarters," the letter said.

Meanwhile, U.S. Army Forces Command will become Western Hemisphere Command through the consolidation of Army North and Army South.

Such moves will reduce the number of general officers, which has been a priority for Hegseth.

The Army remains committed to introducing new long-range missiles and modernized unmanned systems into formations, George and Driscoll said. The service also will field the M1E3 tank as planned.

In addition, the Army will cancel procurement of "outdated crewed attack aircraft" such as older versions of the Apache helicopter and various tactical vehicles.

"Yesterday's weapons will not win tomorrow's wars," the leaders said.

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## MILITARY

# Sex assaults in military drop nearly 4%

## A 13% decrease in Army's numbers offsets rises seen in 3 other services

BY MATTHEW ADAMS  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Sexual assaults reported across the military dropped by nearly 4% last year, marking an overall decrease for the second year in a row as the Pentagon works to reverse a troubling trend that saw an increase of incidents in three service branches, according to a report released earlier this month.

There were 8,195 reported sexual assaults in 2024 involving members of the military, compared with 8,515 in 2023.

Of the total, 6,973 service members reported sexual assault during their military service and another 512 reported an assault that happened before they entered the military.

The figure also includes 641 civilians who said they were assaulted by a member of the military.

This report does not include a sexual assault prevalence rate. The Defense Department conducts the Workplace Experiences Survey of Military Members, a biennial confidential survey, to get a clearer understanding of the problem.

The next survey will be conducted in the fourth quarter of the fiscal 2025.

“We encourage greater reporting of sexual assault to connect victims with care and, also, to have the opportunity to hold offenders appropriately accountable,” Nathan Galbreath, director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, told reporters recently.

The overall decrease was due to a 13% drop in reported sexual assaults across the Army, according to the report.

Three other services saw increases. The Navy had the largest jump of 4.4%, while the Air Force had a 2% increase and the Marine Corps rose by less than 1%.

“It’s important to note that sexual



JAIMEE FREEMAN/U.S. Air Force

**Sexual assaults reported across the military dropped by nearly 4% last year, marking an overall decrease for the second year in a row as the Pentagon works to reverse a troubling trend that saw an increase of incidents in three service branches, according to a report released this month.**

assaults are not always reported in the same [fiscal year] they occur, although the majority are,” the Air Force said in the report.

The Pentagon has worked for years to drive down the rates of sexual assaults and harassment within its ranks, a scourge that has long drawn the ire of Congress.

Top Pentagon officials have also conceded it likely has a negative impact on military recruiting.

The Pentagon has implemented efforts in recent years to address the problem after then-Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin commissioned an independent review of the Pentagon’s sexual assault prevention efforts in 2021.

It has invested heavily in implementing dozens of findings from that commission, nearly doubling its sexual assault prevention budget to more than \$1 billion in 2023 and 2024. The Pentagon has used that funding to stand up new offices to prosecute sexual assault cases outside of the tradi-

tional military chain of command and establish a professionalized prevention workforce.

To date, the Defense Department has hired about 1,400 trained prevention specialists to serve at bases around the globe, said Andra Tharp, director of the Office of Command Climate and Well-Being Integration. The department intends to employ about 2,500 prevention specialists in the next several years.

The process for hiring has been impacted as President Donald Trump and billionaire Elon Musk’s government efficiency team seek to purge personnel and cut agency budgets across the federal government.

Tharp said when the hiring freeze went into effect, there were about 300 positions posted on USAJOBS, the federal government’s employment website, essentially put on hold. However, some military services, such as the Air Force, have been able to get exemptions to “continue moving forward.”

“In the meantime, we’re using this time to ensure ... that we have the right people, the right talent in the right place, and we’re creating contingency plans just to ensure that we don’t kind of lose ground while we’re making these adjustments,” she added.

While reported assaults decreased, the number of sexual harassment complaints went from 2,980 in 2023 to 3,014 last year. Most were filed by female service members and most of those accused were men.

The latest report also reflects the first full year since new prosecution procedures have been in place, putting independent lawyers in charge of those decisions and sidelining commanders after years of pressure from lawmakers.

Under a plan approved by Congress, certain sexual harassment cases under the Uniform Code of Military Justice — the military’s set of laws — will be investigated and prosecuted by the new Offices of Special Trial Counsel in each service branch.

The Defense Department issued a statement in December confirming the special trial counsels of the Army, Air Force, Navy and the Marine Corps will take over Article 134 sexual harassment cases.

Article 134 is the military’s “general article” covering “all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces, and crimes and offenses not capital, of which persons subject to this chapter may be guilty, shall be taken cognizance of by a general, special, or summary court-martial,” according to the U.S. Manual of Courts-Martial.

It is too soon to tell what kind of impact the special trial counsel is making, which will take about three years to see whether there are changes to military justice, Galbreath said.

Sufficient evidence existed to take disciplinary action in 66% of cases investigated for sexual assault under Defense Department jurisdiction in fiscal 2024, according to the report. The report also noted 74% of sexual assault court-martial cases ended in a conviction, a 2% increase from 2023.





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## MILITARY

# USMC barracks improvements face delays

BY CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Marine Corps' barracks improvement effort is being hindered by uncertain congressional funding and the federal hiring freeze as the service has pushed back its completion goal to at least 2037.

"[Our Marines] don't ask for much — just a decent, quiet place to lay their head at night. With a continuing resolution, all that comes to a screeching halt," Gen. Eric Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps, said at the recent Modern Day Marine expo in Washington.

With a price tag of about \$11 billion, the Marine Corps Barracks 2030 initiative aims to modernize unaccompanied housing for single Marines, streamline barracks maintenance and refresh furniture and appliances every 10 years. The initiative, with an initial target completion of 2030, is now on track to have Marines in modernized

barracks by 2037, service officials have said.

But delays in funding, such as the stopgap measure under which the federal government is operating, could push the completion date to as late as 2045. Additionally, President Donald Trump implemented a federal hiring freeze in January that is preventing the Marine Corps Installations Command from hiring about 150 civilian housing specialists to do work now being done by Marines. Those specialists were slated to start in February but are unable to do so until the hiring freeze is lifted.

The federal government has been operating under a full-year continuing resolution since March 14, after lawmakers failed to agree on appropriations for fiscal 2025, which began Oct. 1. The stopgap funding bill is a temporary extension of last year's funding, plus an additional \$6 billion for pay raises for junior troops as well as

weapons purchases and operations.

"You can't hire the labor. You can't buy the building or materials. You can't start a new project. So, you continue to put lipstick on a pig, and you keep the old barracks around for just another year, and another year, and another year," Smith said.

About 17,000 junior enlisted Marines were living in squalid barracks as of 2023, according to the Government Accountability Office, a federal watchdog report. During barracks inspections at various installations, the GAO observed mold, pests, sewage issues, and extreme temperatures.

With questions about long-term funding, the Marine Corps is doing what it can now to improve the barracks, service officials said. Eric Mason, unaccompanied housing team lead for the Marine Corps Installations Command, said that the number of Marines living in poor conditions was lower than 17,000 now.

"I can only tell you that number has decreased, and it will continue to decrease. Once we get out to our potential 2030 — or 2035, 2037 — [completion date], that number should hopefully go away," Mason said.

The service has 11 ongoing renovation projects, with 12 more in the pipeline. Additionally, programs are being rolled out at Marine Corps bases that are collecting data on streamlining maintenance and improving barracks security.

The Marine Corps also rolled out a program for troops living in barracks to submit maintenance requests to building managers to streamline repairs for issues such as leaks, mold and pests.

The online portal is already seeing widespread use, capturing 1,000 requests per week.

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## 'Super Squadron' marks strategic shift in S. Korea

BY SETH ROBSON  
*Stars and Stripes*

The U.S. 7th Air Force is forming a second "Super Squadron" of 31 F-16 Fighting Falcons at Osan Air Base, its largest installation in South Korea and the one closest to the North Korean border.

The shift will draw down resources at Kunsan Air Base, about 115 miles southwest of Seoul, and means that, eventually, no forces will be assigned to the two fighter squadrons there.

The Air Force began evaluating the concept of a super squadron — which includes one-third more aircraft than standard units — last summer to determine whether it could generate more sorties with fewer resources, 7th Air Force spokeswoman Maj. Rachel Buitrago said.

In July, nine aircraft and 150 airmen from Kunsan arrived at Osan to establish the first 31-jet squadron. This month, additional F-16s and roughly 1,000 more airmen will relocate from Kunsan to Osan to form the second squadron, Buitrago said.

"The airmen will start arriving in the next couple of weeks and all aircraft and personnel will be in place by Octo-



KARISSA DICK/U.S. Air Force

**An F-16 Fighting Falcon piloted by the 8th Fighter Wing's commander taxis out of a hangar at Kunsan Air Base, South Korea, in April.**

ber," she said.

While 7th Air Force described the movement of personnel and aircraft as a temporary measure in an April 24 news release, details suggest a more substantial shift.

"This Super Squadron effort demonstrates our steadfast focus on readiness and combat capability to achieve U.S. national security objectives," 7th Air Force commander Lt. Gen. David Iverson said in the release.

Iverson said the first consolidated

unit at Osan has already improved readiness and combat performance, although it has revealed some operational challenges.

The restructuring reflects broader U.S. military planning in the Indo-Pacific. While consolidation may enhance peacetime efficiency, big bases like Osan could become vulnerable targets in the event of a conflict, particularly with China, analysts say.

"In the event of conflict, however, they become a bigger target," Ralph

Cossa, former president of the Pacific Forum think tank in Hawaii, said by email. "Presumably there are also dispersal plans in the event of increased tensions; if not, they just become a more tempting target."

The new squadrons will optimize combat power at bases in South Korea but that doesn't preclude repositioning forces if needed, said Dan Leaf, a former deputy commander of what is now called Indo-Pacific Command.

"The 'super squadrons' will get the most capability out of available aircraft, personnel, and facilities," he said this month.

Kunsan's 80th and 35th Fighter Squadrons are sending their aircraft to Osan, Buitrago said. Eventually, no forces will be assigned to them.

Despite the drawdown, the 8th Fighter Wing will continue operating Kunsan as a rotational and exercise base, according to the Air Force. The base will maintain flightline operations, war reserve materials and munitions stockpiles at multiple locations across South Korea.

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## MILITARY

# Floating pier project plagued with flaws

Troops ill-equipped, undertrained for mission near Gaza, watchdog reports

By CAITLYN BURCHETT  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Army and Navy units who worked on the U.S. military's humanitarian effort to move supplies into Gaza using a floating pier were ill-equipped, undermanned and lacked training for the mission, the Pentagon's inspector general has concluded.

The report, released recently, pointed to a breakdown in joint training and years of divestment in mission-essential watercraft.

"The [Defense Department] repeatedly encountered challenges and inefficiencies during [Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore] operations and exercises, including during Operation Neptune Solace in Gaza," according to the IG report.

Operation Neptune Solace, which spanned from March 2024 to July 2024, was an Army-Navy mission to build a temporary pier to funnel humanitarian aid into Gaza after Israeli forces launched a military campaign into the enclave in response to the October 2023 surprise attack on Israel by Hamas militants. As the war raged, world health officials warned millions of Gazans were facing extreme hunger as Israel retaliated against Hamas.

The purpose of the pier was to deliver aid without putting U.S. troops in harm's way in the war-torn region. But the mission was hampered by bad weather and logistical issues that resulted in the loss or damaging of vessels and equipment and numerous personnel injuries, including the death of one soldier.

The Navy reported 27 watercraft and equipment were damaged during the Gaza mission, totaling approximately \$31 million in repairs and maintenance costs, according to the report. U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, reported 62 injuries among U.S. personnel supporting the mission, though the inspector general was unable to



JORDAN KIRK-JOHNSON/U.S. Navy

**A truck carries humanitarian aid across a floating pier and onto the beach in Gaza in June 2024. The temporary pier, part of the U.S. military's Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore capability, enabled maritime delivery of international aid to war-torn Gaza.**

determine whether the injuries occurred while on-duty, off-duty or due to pre-existing health conditions. The report did not say whether the 62 injured includes service members and Defense Department contractors.

The mission was short lived. The pier became operational May 14, 2024, but just two weeks after it was in service, officials were forced to suspend operations and remove the pier from the shore to repair damage caused by rough weather. The pier again was removed from the Gaza shore at the end of June due to bad weather and was kept at the Israeli port of Ashdod for weeks when officials announced July 17 that the operation was ending.

The Pentagon's inspector general was directed in late June by the Senate Armed Services Committee to review the Gaza pier mission. The report concluded the Army and Navy did not meet service-level standards for equipment and unit readiness to perform JLOTS operations.

"We identified that the Army and Navy faced low equipment mission-capable rates and low manning and training levels," the report reads.

While the number of personnel assigned to the joint units was redacted, the report found the Army and Navy struggled to staff the ships for the Gaza mission, which delayed the deployment

of some watercraft.

"[Navy Beach Group One] had to pull together every person they could to sufficiently staff vessels in accordance with Navy requirements," the report reads.

It also found the Army and Navy did not organize, train and equip to a common joint standard for JLOTS operations and exercises. This was due, in part, to U.S. Transportation Command not establishing joint mission standards, minimum planning standards and requirements for the services and their equipment to work together. TRANSCOM, which oversees and coordinates the Defense Department's logistics distribution efforts, is responsible for planning JLOTS training and operations.

"USTRANSCOM officials identified communications challenges as early as six years before Operation Neptune Solace," the IG report reads, referencing exercise reports from 2018.

From 2014-2024, the Defense Department conducted one JLOTS operation and 11 JLOTS exercises. Four of the 11 exercises identified problems with the vessel or equipment maintenance, readiness or availability.

A 2020 review specifically noted watercraft maintenance shortfalls and identified the need for the Army and Navy to address reductions of JLOTS-

capable equipment and personnel across the Defense Department. Additionally, seven of the 11 JLOTS exercises identified problems with communication. These challenges included a lack of shared knowledge between the Army and Navy participants, gaps in their systems integration and the need for a common operating view.

In recent years, the services divested in JLOTS-capable units and equipment. In 2023, the Navy decommissioned one of its two JLOTS-capable units and deactivated the Elevated Causeway System, a JLOTS system that provided the Navy with the capability to construct a more weather-resistant pier.

Additionally, the Army sold about 48% of its watercraft between 2018 and 2019, reducing the Army's JLOTS watercraft from a force of 134 boats down to 70 boats.

The inspector general made three recommendations, including the Army and Navy review watercraft units and determine improvements to force structure, training and equipment acquisition and maintenance. It was also recommended TRANSCOM develop and implement a plan to meet its JLOTS responsibilities.

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MILITARY

# Army to create space specialist career

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A new space operations specialty for enlisted soldiers will support ground forces through the use of electronic warfare, Army officials announced.

The new career field, known as 40D space operations specialist, is expected to be in place by October 2026, Army Space and Missile Defense Command boss Lt. Gen. Sean Gainey said.

“These soldiers will become the

experts we turn to during the next conflict,” Gainey said during a Pentagon briefing.

The space specialists will disrupt adversaries and ensure that Army forces can “fight from positions of relative advantage in all domains,” he said. That will mean using an electronic warfare arsenal so soldiers can maneuver and communicate without being detected, Gainey said.

The new specialty also is expected to

boost soldier retention.

It will offer more professional stability for troops who now operate outside their assigned jobs in the air defense, signal and intelligence fields to assist in space operations, Gainey said.

Since U.S. Space Command was reestablished by President Donald Trump in 2019, the military services have been building up their respective space capabilities.

That same year, Trump also estab-

lished the Space Force as a separate military branch.

The 40D soldiers will attend the Space and Missile Defense Center of Excellence at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado Springs, Colo.

That will take place after initial entry training is completed, the Army said.

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## AI tool could better manage ammo stocks

By JOHN VANDIVER  
*Stars and Stripes*

A new artificial intelligence program could change how the U.S. military manages its ammunition needs by crunching mounds of data to outthink the current approach.

Called the Quarterly Resupply Model, it aims to revolutionize the logistics of the military’s expansive ammunition management enterprise, Joint Munitions Command said in a recent statement.

A recent experiment found that a machine learning model generated 27,300 forecasts, achieving a 74% prediction accuracy on ammunition requirements, compared with a 25% accuracy rate for the current system, the command said.



U.S. Army

**An Anniston Munitions Center, Ala., an employee moves ammunition for distribution. An artificial intelligence program could alter how the U.S. military manages its ammunition supply needs, Army officials said.**

The discovery “represents a significant advancement in ammunition logistics,” Ryan Senkbile, acting director of the command’s munitions

logistics distribution division, said in the statement.

The milestone was achieved in September after a yearlong development process, the Army said.

The model can account for variations in ammunition consumption, training schedules and installation requirements, the command said.

For years, the military has relied on the Total Ammunition Management Information System to handle how ammunition is dispersed across the force.

The effort is managed by the Army but relied on by much of the armed forces.

The current web-enabled system calculates combat load requirements, validates and routes electronic requests, collects expenditures and prepares forecasts, according to a 2021 Marine Corps summary of the

program.

For the military, ensuring adequate amounts of ammunition are fielded to U.S. troops and units worldwide is a multibillion-dollar expense.

The Army didn’t indicate whether the AI tool will ultimately replace the current system.

However, the new machine learning approach can analyze historical data to better predict future ammunition requirements, the Army said.

The aim of the new model is to reduce shipment frequency, optimize inventory levels and enhance forecasting accuracy, Senkbile said.

The model, which is operating at relevant stateside locations, is still having its performance monitored, the Army said, adding that the data-driven approach “allows for continuous improvement.”

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