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The U.S. Army's Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW): Dark Eagle

What Is the Army's Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW)?

The Army's LRHW—also known as Dark Eagle (**Figure 1**)—with a reported range of 1,725 miles, consists of a ground-launched missile equipped with a hypersonic glide body and associated transport, support, and fire control equipment. The LRHW is intended to provide the Army with a long-range, conventional precision strike capability against time sensitive and heavily defended targets, particularly in contested environments.

Figure 1. LRHW Transporter Erector Launcher (TEL)



Source: Army News, https://www.army.mil/article/265349/1st_multi_domain_task_force_deploys_the_armys_first_long_range_hypersonic_weapon_system, accessed March 29, 2026.

The Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E) notes that

Army commanders will use the LRHW (Dark Eagle) to engage adversary high-payoff and time-sensitive targets. U.S. Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), with direction from the National Command Authority, will serve as the employment authority for LRHW missions.

On April 24, 2025, the Army formally designated the LRHW as the Dark Eagle.

LRHW Components

Missile

The missile component of the LRHW is being developed by Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman. When the hypersonic glide body is attached, it is referred to as the Navy-Army All Up Round plus Canister (AUR+C). The missile component serves as the common two-stage booster for the Army's LRHW and the Navy's Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) system, which can be fired from both surface vessels and submarines.

Common Hypersonic Glide Body (C-HGB)

The C-HGB is based on the Alternate Re-Entry System developed by the Army and Sandia National Laboratories. Dynetics, a subsidiary of Leidos, currently is under contract to produce C-HGB prototypes for the Army and Navy. The C-HGB uses a booster rocket motor to accelerate to well above hypersonic speeds and then jettisons the expended rocket booster. The C-HGB, which can travel at Mach 5 or higher on its own, is planned to be maneuverable, potentially making it more difficult to detect and intercept.

LRHW Organization and Units

The LRHW battalion is organized into batteries. According to the Army, the "LRHW system [battery] consists of Army ground support equipment—one battery operations center (BOC), four transporter erector launchers, a BOC support vehicle and up to eight All-Up Rounds plus Canister."

The 5th Battalion, 3rd Field Artillery Regiment, at Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM), WA, was designated to operate the first battery of eight LRHW missiles. The battalion, also referred to as the Long-Range Fires Battalion, is part of the Army's 1st Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF), a unit in the Indo-Pacific-oriented I Corps stationed at JBLM. Other LRHW batteries are planned for Long-Range Fires Battalions in the remaining MDTFs scheduled for activation.

LRHW Testing and Program Activities

According to the January 2023 Congressional Budget Office study *U.S. Hypersonic Weapons and Alternatives*, extensive flight testing is necessary to shield "hypersonic missiles' sensitive electronics" to understand "how various materials perform" and predict "aerodynamics at sustained temperatures as high as 3,000° Fahrenheit." The Army had planned for three flight tests of the LRHW before the first battery fielding in FY2023. On October 21, 2021, the booster rocket carrying the C-HGB vehicle reportedly failed a test flight, resulting in what defense officials characterized as a "no test," as the C-HGB had no chance to deploy. Reportedly, a June 2022 test of the entire LRHW missile also resulted in failure.

First Successful LRHW Flight Test

On June 28, 2024, DOD announced that

The U.S. Navy and U.S. Army recently completed an end-to-end flight test of a hypersonic missile from the Pacific Missile Range Facility, Kauai, HI.

Reportedly, the two-stage missile was launched from a ground stand in Hawaii across the Pacific Ocean more than 2,000 miles to a test range in the Marshall Islands, with the

missile flying its intended course and releasing the C-HGB, which flew to the target.

March 2026 LRHW Flight Test

On April 2, 2026, DOD announced that

The U.S. Army's Portfolio Acquisition Executive Fires, in partnership with the U.S. Navy's Portfolio Acquisition Executive Strategic Systems Programs, conducted a successful launch of a common hypersonic missile from Cape Canaveral Space Force Station, Florida, on March 26, 2026.

First Operational LRHW Fielding Expected

Reportedly, on March 20, 2026, an Army official stated that “the Dark Eagle battery based at Joint Base Lewis-McChord [JBLM] in the Pacific Northwest will receive its first operational [LRHW] missiles soon” and that “Bravo Battery, 1st Battalion, 17th Field Artillery Regiment, 3rd Multi-Domain Task Force, based at JBLM, has been designated to operate” the LRHW.

Government Accountability Office (GAO) 2026 Weapon Systems Annual Assessment

GAO's 2026 Weapon System Annual Assessment of the LRHW program provided the following update:

Program officials stated that the Army will not field its first LRHW battery—including missiles—until at least the second quarter of [FY]2026. This is over 2 years later than its initial goal and 9 months later than our last assessment. The Army resolved launcher and missile quality issues, which we previously reported on, and conducted a successful end-to-end missile flight test—the first using its launch system—in the first quarter of [FY]2025. Some of the problems discovered during earlier flight tests created a production bottleneck as the Army and Navy paused production until the missile was successfully tested. Officials stated that the contractor has continued to experience issues at its facility. The program worked with a third-party consultant to identify challenges and make recommendations to increase the rate of missile production. The program said that it was working with the contractor and Navy to implement the recommendations.

The Army will also not meet one of its fielding goals for the LRHW MTA [middle tier acquisition] effort. Program officials stated that the Army will not field its second LRHW battery—including missiles—until the second quarter of [FY]2027 due to missile delivery delays of at least 6 months. The second battery also includes a missile with minor modifications, which has not been flight tested as of January 2026. Officials stated that production challenges delayed testing of this missile until the second quarter of [FY]2026. The third battery could also face similar delays because the Navy's CPS program, which develops missiles for the LRHW program, has not finalized the design as of January

2026. The Army plans to field these missiles sooner than the Navy. The program stated that it is working with the Navy to finalize the design, but the time needed to test it remains a concern. Officials said the Army exercised the contract option for the third battery's launchers and related equipment in the third quarter of [FY]2025—6 months later than planned—due to funding delays associated with a continuing resolution. The program does not expect that delay to affect its fielding goal.

FY2027 LRHW Budget Request

According to DOD's FY2027 Budget Program Acquisition Cost by Weapons System, the Army is requesting \$446.6 million in Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation (RDT&E) funding and \$301.8 million in procurement funding for the LRHW program.

Oversight Consideration for Congress

Congress may consider additional oversight of the program.

LRHW Missile Costs, Operational Testing, and Stockpile

Congress has expressed concern regarding the cost of LRHW missiles as well as further operational testing and missile stockpile requirements. As the Army begins procurement of its first eight missiles, continues fielding LRHW batteries, conducts additional operational tests, and builds missile stockpiles, Congress might decide to require more frequent updates from Army program officials. Enhanced oversight of LRHW missile production as the Army attempts to achieve full operational capability could better inform future congressional budgetary decisions and the program's overall direction.

LRHW Fielding Delays

As GAO's 2026 annual assessment noted, “the Army will not field its first LRHW battery—including missiles—until at least the second quarter of [FY]2026” and “will not field its second LRHW battery—including missiles—until the second quarter of [FY]2027 due to missile delivery delays of at least 6 months.” The third LRHW battery fielding might also be delayed because of funding delays attributed to continuing resolutions. These delays have been attributed to several factors, including problems discovered in flight tests, issues at contractor facilities, and funding delays. In view of GAO's 2026 LRHW program findings, Congress might examine the program in greater detail. Such an examination could include LRHW flight test performances, including both deficiencies identified in flight testing and subsequent corrective actions taken. Another item for examination could be contractor adequacy, to include production facilities. From a readiness and operational perspective, such examination might include the current and future implications of delayed LRHW battery fieldings and the potential for future delays.

Related Reports

CRS In Focus IF11797, *The Army's Multi-Domain Task Force (MDTF)*, by Andrew Feickert and Ebrima M'Bai.

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