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U.S. Army Aviation: Background and Issues for Congress

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U.S. Army Aviation: Background and Issues for Congress

All services of the U.S. military have their own distinctive aviation branches. The mission of Army Aviation, according to the Army, is to "find, fix, and destroy any enemy through fire and maneuver and to provide combat support and combat service support in coordinated operations as an integral member of the combined arms team."

Army Aviation units are part of the Active Component (AC) and the Reserve Component (RC). The RC consists of the Army National Guard (ARNG) and U.S. Army Reserve (USAR). According to Army budget documents, in 2026, these units comprised approximately 3,000 helicopters (i.e., rotary-wing aircraft, or rotorcraft) and approximately 300 fixed-wing aerial platforms, as well as approximately 52,600 Active, Guard, and Reserve aviation personnel, including pilots, maintainers, and support soldiers. Individual soldiers and units across the Army also operate small uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) for a variety of purposes.

The conflict in Ukraine has challenged assumptions, along with technology and doctrine development, relating to Army Aviation. The Biden Administration and Trump Administration have undertaken initiatives to adapt legacy aviation platforms and their employment on the battlefield. These actions have included the deactivation of some Army Aviation units, particularly in the USAR; the divestment of aircraft; and the elimination of aviation positions across all components.

SUMMARY

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In 2024, the Army instituted what it called the Aviation Investment Rebalance, which discontinued the Army's development of the crewed Future Attack and Reconnaissance Aircraft (FARA) helicopter while maintaining its investment in the crewed tilt-rotor Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA) and making new investments in UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47F Block II Chinook helicopters. The Army also phased out operations of systems it deemed were not capable or survivable on the battlefield, including the RQ-7 Shadow and RQ-11 Raven UAS.

In 2025, at the direction of the Secretary of Defense (who is using "Secretary of War" as a "secondary title" under Executive Order 14347, dated September 5, 2025), the Army instituted the Army Transformation Initiative (ATI) to reorganize the Army's overall force structure, organization, and weapon systems. In terms of Army Aviation, the ATI has included

- developing the FLRAA;
- restructuring Army Aviation by reducing one Air Cavalry Squadron of 24 AH-64 Apache helicopters per Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) in the AC;
- divesting two Army Reserve Expeditionary CABs, eliminating more than 3,000 positions and 180 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters, and transferring modernized UH-60Ms to the ARNG;
- canceling the procurement of what the Army described as "outdated" crewed attack aircraft, such as the AH-64D Apache variant, and "obsolete" UAS, such as the Gray Eagle; and
- planning to divest more than 300 AH-64 Apache and UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters by FY2027.

The Army may continue to revise its planned changes to Army Aviation's force structure and equipment. The Army's restructuring efforts raise potential oversight issues for Congress, including the following:

- the impact of incorporating UAS into Army Aviation;
- the ATI restructuring's impact on RC aviation;
- the industrial base effects of changing Army helicopter and UAS requirements;
- the reduction in requirements for pilots for crewed platforms;
- the evolving threats and the future of Army aviation; and
- assessments of impacts to maintenance and readiness.

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Introduction: Congress and Army Aviation

Congress authorizes and appropriates funds for the U.S. Army on an annual basis and sets end strengths that limit the size of the respective forces. Together with the executive branch, Congress ensures the Army is equipped and supplied, determines pay and benefits, establishes personnel policies, and exercises oversight of its management. If Congress chooses, it can also allocate roles and missions for the Army, including the Reserve Component (RC); determine training requirements; establish or disestablish units; specify unit composition; and designate the number and types of units within each component. Army restructuring initiatives since 2024, including the Aviation Investment Rebalance and the Army Transformation Initiative (ATI), have proposed changing Army Aviation force structure, aircraft modernization priorities, and soldier and workforce requirements. In its budget request for FY2027, the Army proposed scaling back previously planned procurement of crewed helicopter programs—the UH-60 Black Hawk and CH-47 Chinook.[1] These changes may present legislative and oversight considerations for Congress, potentially including the following questions:

- What information is Congress receiving from the Army about its plans to change Army Aviation force structure and investments? Is the information adequate to enable effective legislative decisionmaking?
- What are the implications of the Army's proposed reduction in the procurement of crewed Army Aviation helicopters to accelerate the development of the MV-75 Cheyenne II tilt-rotor aircraft? What opportunities and risks might arise from speeding development of emerging technologies to support Army aviation needs?
- Does the proposed restructuring of Army Aviation optimize the branch for the future? How might cuts to aviation units in the RC affect the capacity and effectiveness of the Aviation branch or that of other Army components?
- To what extent has the Army relied on lessons learned from Ukraine, Iran, Venezuela, and other armed conflicts to inform its plans to restructure Army Aviation? What other scenarios might inform the future of Army Aviation? Has the Army communicated to Congress a vision for the role the Aviation branch would play in future conflicts?
- To what extent should the Army Aviation branch be responsible for managing the integration of small uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS) into the Army, or should it share that responsibility with other branches? What roles and responsibilities should UAS have in fulfilling the Army Aviation missions?

[1] U.S. Army, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, March 2024, https://www.asafm.army.mil/Portals/72/Documents/BudgetMaterial/2025/Base%20Budget/Procurement/Aircraft-Procurement-Army.pdf.

Background

The Mission of Army Aviation

The Army describes the mission of Army Aviation, 1 of 20 basic branches of the Army, as[2]

> to find, fix, and destroy any enemy through fire and maneuver and to provide combat support and combat service support in coordinated operations as an integral member of the combined arms team.[3]

Army Aviation's seven core competencies are as follows:

> Provide accurate and timely information collection.
>
> Provide early warning, reaction time, and maneuver space.
>
> Destroy, dislocate, disintegrate, or isolate enemy forces.
>
> Air assault [operations].
>
> Air movement [i.e., transport of personnel, supplies, equipment].
>
> Aerial evacuation.
>
> Enable command and control.[4]

A Brief History of Army Aviation

The history of Army aviation dates to the Union Army's brief use of air balloons for reconnaissance during the American Civil War.[5] The Army Signal Corps acquired the nation's first military aircraft from the Wright Brothers in 1909.[6] Congress established the Aviation Section as a subordinate organization of the Signal Corps in 1914.[7] In 1920, Congress established the Army Air Service (later, the Army Air Corps) as a separate arm of the Army.[8]

In 1941, the War Department established the Army Air Forces (AAF). In 1942, the department separated the AAF and Army Ground Forces into coequal commands,[9] and the department approved the formation of "organic air observation units" in the Army Ground Forces.[10] During World War II, these units were equipped with light, fixed-wing aircraft for air observation, liaison, and target acquisition, supplementing the ground support provided by the AAF. In the National Security Act of 1947, Congress established the Department of the Air Force and transferred the AAF to the Air Force, among other changes to the organization of national defense.[11]

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[2] Basic branches of the Army consist of career fields in combat, combat support, and services support roles, which include the infantry, aviation, military intelligence, and ordnance branches.

[3] U.S. Army, "U.S. Army Aviation," accessed April 6, 2026, https://www.army.mil/aviation/; and U.S. Army, *[Field Manual] FM 3-04 Army Aviation*, March 2025, p. xi, https://armypubs.army.mil/ProductMaps/PubForm/Details.aspx?PUB_ID=1030760.

[4] U.S. Army, *[Field Manual] FM 3-04 Army Aviation*, p. 4.

[5] Juliette A. Hennessy, *The United States Army Air Army, April 1861 to April 1917*, U.S. Air Force, Office of Air Force History, 1985, pp. 6-11.

[6] Richard Tierney, *The Army Aviation Story* (Colonial Press, 1963), p. 34.

[7] P.L. 63-143; 38 Stat. 514.

[8] P.L. 66-242, §13a; 41 Stat. 759. Congress renamed the service the Army Air Corps in 1926. P.L. 69-446; 44 Stat. 780.

[9] U.S. Air Force, Air Force Historical Research Agency, *Legislative History of the AAF and USAF 1941-1951*, September 1955, p. 9; and Tierney, *The Army Aviation Story*, pp. 38-39.

[10] U.S. Department of War, *Organic Air Observation for Field Artillery*, [War Department Organization and Training Division] WDGCT 320.2, 1942; and Richard R. Weinert, Jr., *A History of Army Aviation—1950-1962*, U.S. Army, Training and Doctrine Command, 1991, pp. 5-6.

[11] P.L. 80-253, §207(f); 61 Stat. 495.

The Army retained a role for aviation under the National Security Act of 1947, which stated that the Army would include "such aviation and water transport as may be organic therein."[12] Prior the Korean War, the Army's aircraft inventory comprised mostly of light aircraft allocated to Army ground forces in World War II for air observation and liaison.[13] During the Korean War and the Vietnam War, rotary-wing aircraft, which had made their operational debut in the U.S. military in World War II, assumed greater prominence in the Army.[14] By 1970, the Army's fleet numbered more than 12,000 aircraft.[15]

In 1983, using authority provided by Congress in Title 10, Section 7063(a)(13), of the *U.S. Code*, the Army established Army Aviation as a basic branch.[16] The organization of Army Aviation units and the treatment of aviation forces in Army doctrine evolved throughout the 1980s.[17] Under the Army 86 and Army of Excellence initiatives, the Army formed aviation brigades—forerunners to the combat aviation brigade (CAB)—composed of aviation battalions and companies tailored to specific missions (e.g., air assault, attack, and reconnaissance).[18]

Under the Army's Modular Force initiative of the early 2000s, the Army standardized aviation brigades by creating heavy, medium, and light designs, each comprised of a corresponding number of battalions and companies, aircraft, and personnel.[19] In 2014, the Army developed the Aviation Restructuring Initiative (ARI), in which it proposed reducing the size of the aviation force, retiring older aircraft, and realigning attack helicopters from the Army National Guard to the Active Component.[20] The ARI resulted in the Army's divesture of the OH-58 Kiowa scout helicopter; other elements of the plan met opposition in Congress and from the National Guard Bureau.[21] Between 2014 and 2024, the Army Aviation force structure numbered approximately 4,000 aircraft.[22]

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[12] P.L. 80-253, §207(e).

[13] Earl R. McClendon, *Army Aviation, 1947-1953*, U.S. Air Force, Air University, 1954, p. 3; and U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Department of Defense Appropriations, *Department of Defense Appropriations for 1951*, Part 2: Department of the Army, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., April 1950, 1950, p. 803.

[14] W.E. Butterworth, *Flying Army: The Modern Air Arm of the U.S. Army* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), pp. 128-157.

[15] William Gardner Bell, *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1970*, U.S. Army, Center for Military History, 1973, p. 100.

[16] Department of the Army, Headquarters, *General Order No. 6, Army Aviation Branch*, GO 6, 1984, history.army.mil/Portals/143/ArmyBirthdayDocs/Aviation/DA_GO_1984-06.pdf. Under §306 of the Army Organization Act of 1950 (P.L. 81-581), codified as 10 U.S.C. §§7063-7064, Congress established 12 basic branches (infantry, armor, etc.) and 3 special branches. Under 10 U.S.C. §7063(a)(13), Congress authorized the Secretary of the Army to assign its members to "such other basic branches as the Secretary considers necessary."

[17] For a discussion of the development of Army helicopter doctrine, see Matthew Allen, *Military Helicopter Doctrines of the Major Powers, 1945-1992: Making Decisions About Air-Land Warfare* (Greenwood, 1993).

[18] John L. Romjue, *The Army of Excellence: The Development of the 1980s Army*, U.S. Army, Training and Doctrine Command, 1997, pp. 93-94; and Allen, *Military Helicopter Doctrines of the Major Powers, 1945-1992*, p. 35.

[19] William M. Donnelly, *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force 1991-2005*, U.S. Army, Center for Military History, 2007, pp. 56-58. The Army also introduced an "expeditionary" design of the brigade for the Army National Guard (ARNG).

[20] William M. Donnelly, *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 2015*, U.S. Army, Center for Military History, 2021, pp. 31-32; U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Army Force Structure: Observations about Aviation Restructuring and Other Relevant Force Structure Challenges*, May 20, 2015, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d15616SP.pdf; and GAO, *Force Structure: Army's Analyses of Aviation Alternatives*, GAO-15-430R, April 27, 2015, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-15-430r.pdf.

[21] Teresa J. Cleveland, "OH-58D 'Kiowa Warrior' Takes Final Flight," U.S. Air Force, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, September 20, 2017, https://www.jble.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/1317667/oh-58d-kiowa-warrior-takes-final-flight/. For more information, see CRS Report R44366, *National Commission on the Future of the Army (NCFA): Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert. When the Army divests aircraft, it reports to the General Services Administration on the airframe's airworthiness and works with the Defense Logistics Agency on the aircraft's future, whether that is reuse, transfer, donation, or some other purpose. See Defense Logistics Agency, "Aircraft and Components," accessed on November 9, 2026, https://www.dla.mil/Disposition-Services/DDSR/Property-Turn-In/Turn-In-Toolbox/Vehicles-and-Transportation/Aerial-Vehicles-and-Components/#fscap.

[22] Congressional Budget Office (CBO), *Availability and Use of Aircraft in the Army*, September 5, 2024, p. 7, https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/2024-08/60313-army-aircraft.pdf.

Army Aviation Organization

Army Aviation is organized across the Active Component (AC) and RC—the Army National Guard (ARNG) and Army Reserve (USAR)—with each component contributing distinct aviation capabilities.[23] Collectively, Army Aviation provides attack, assault, reconnaissance, medical evacuation (MEDEVAC), command and control, and sustainment aviation in support of Army and joint operations. Although aviation units across components operate similar aircraft, they differ in mission focus, readiness posture, and integration into the Army's operational plans.

Historically, the Army maintained a broad aviation force structure to support rotational deployments, facilitate enhanced counterinsurgency operations, and meet global response requirements. The Army, citing rising sustainment costs, aging aircraft fleets, and the increasing threat posed by modern air defenses and UAS, has proposed changes to the organization of the reserve and active components Army Aviation branch.[24] (For more information, see "Army Aviation Restructuring " section.)

Active Component (AC)

The AC provides the majority of the Army's deployable aviation combat power. AC aviation units are organized primarily into combat aviation brigades (CABs), which are designed to support division- and corps-level operations.[25] Since the early 2000s, CABs have included a mix of Attack Battalions, Assault Helicopter Battalions, Air Cavalry Squadrons, General Support Aviation Battalions, and Aviation Support Battalions, as well as a Gray Eagle UAS company and a headquarters company.

At present, Attack Battalions and Air Cavalry Squadrons carry out attack and reconnaissance missions primarily with AH-64 Apache attack helicopters. Assault Helicopter Battalions conduct air assault and air movement, among other tasks, with UH-60 Black Hawk utility helicopters. General Support Aviation Brigades provide command and control, heavy-lift, and MEDEVAC support with a mix of UH-60s, CH-47 Chinooks, and HH-60 Black Hawk MEDEVAC helicopters. Aviation Support Battalions provide ground network, maintenance, and field support.[26]

Reserve Component (RC)

The RC has historically fulfilled different aviation roles across its two subcomponents. The ARNG, which operates AH-64 Apaches, UH-60 Black Hawks, HH-60 MEDEVAC aircraft, and CH-47 Chinooks, provides a substantial portion of the Army's assault, MEDEVAC, and heavy-lift aviation capacity (see **Appendix A**). Guard aviation units routinely support domestic emergency response missions under state authority and deploy overseas in support of federal missions. Until the Army restructuring initiative of 2025, the USAR focused on aviation sustainment and enabling formations, providing depth and support rather than frontline aviation combat power.

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[23] The ARNG and U.S. Army Reserve (USAR) are collectively referred to as the Reserve Component (RC).

[24] U.S. Army, "Army Announces Aviation Investment Rebalance," press release, February 8, 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/273594/army_announces_aviation_investment_rebalance.

[25] An Army division generally has between 12,000 and 16,000 soldiers, while an Army corps generally has between 40,000 and 100,000 soldiers. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF10571, *Defense Primer: Organization of U.S. Ground Forces*, by Barbara Salazar Torreon and Andrew Feickert.

[26] U.S. Army, *FM 3-04 Army Aviation*, pp. 33-34.

USAR aviation included Expeditionary CABs (ECABs), GSAB elements, MEDEVAC companies, and fixed-wing aircraft supporting logistics and operational mobility.

Army Aviation Systems

Army Aviation units have consisted primarily of helicopters (i.e., rotary-wing aircraft, or rotorcraft) with limited UAS (sometimes called drones). The Army is integrating additional modern UAS into Army Aviation units and non-aviation formations. The following sections describe both crewed and uncrewed aviation systems.

Crewed Rotary-Wing Systems

Since around the mid-1980s, the service has consistently procured the AH-64 Apache, UH-60 Black Hawk, and CH-47 Chinook crewed helicopters.[27] The ATI is shifting the Army's rotary-wing inventory to include a combination of UAS and development of the Future Long Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA), known as the MV-75 Cheyenne II, with the aim of accelerating production to have a faster, longer-range aircraft for operations in the Pacific theater. (See **Table 1** for an inventory of each type of helicopter discussed here.)

Table 1. U.S. Army Crewed Aircraft Inventory FY2025-FY2027

Aircraft	Type	FY2025 Actual	FY2026 Enacted	FY2027 Projected
AH-64 Apache	Attack	618	432	384
CH-47 Chinook	Cargo	353	369	324
HH-60 Black Hawk	Medevac	347	336	352
UH-60 Black Hawk	Utility	1,467	1,224	1,097
UH-72 Lakota	Training	684	684	685
Fixed-Wing Aircraft	(Multiple)	264[a]	265[a]	244[a]
Total		**3,733**	**3,310**	**3,086**

Source: CRS analysis of Department of Defense (DOD), *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army, Volume I*, April 2026, pp. 133, 136; DOD, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army Reserve, Volume 1*, April 2026, pp. 91-92; and DOD, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army National Guard, Volume 1*, April 2026, pp. 103, 105. (DOD is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.)

Notes: For more information, see **Appendix A**.

a. Figure includes contractor-owned and contractor-operated aircraft.

AH-64 Apache

According to the Army, "the AH-64 Apache is a twin-engine, four bladed, multi-mission attack helicopter designed as a highly stable aerial weapons-delivery platform."[28] The Army fielded the

[27] U.S. Army, "History of Fort Rucker," accessed May 11, 2026, https://home.army.mil/rucker/history.

[28] U.S. Army, "AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopter," November 4, 2014, https://www.army.mil/article/137579/ah_64e_apache_attack_helicopter.

first versions of the AH-64 (see **Figure 1**) in 1984.[29] The Army currently operates the AH-64D and E model aircraft.

Figure 1. AH-64 Apache



Source: Figure from Boeing, "AH-64 Apache," accessed February 22, 2026, https://www.boeing.com/defense/military-rotorcraft/ah-64-apache.

The newest type of Apache, the AH-64E, Version 6.5, includes enhanced Link 16 features and an open systems interface to enable technology insertion.[30] The Apache can carry a payload of up to 16 Hellfire missiles or 76 2.75-inch rockets and 1,200 30 mm chain-gun rounds capable of firing up to 650 rounds per minute.[31] In December 2025, the AH-64 demonstrated the ability to target UAS in the air and on the ground, and news articles reported that some U.S. partners have used the AH-64 to defend against Iranian UAS since February 28, 2026.[32] Apaches have been targeted by UAS as well; according to U.S. Central Command, on June 8, a U.S. Army AH-64 went down near the coast of Oman.[33] Boeing manufactures the Apache in Mesa, AZ.[34]

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[29] U.S. Army, "AH-64E Apache Attack Helicopter."

[30] U.S. Army, Program Executive Office (PEO) Aviation, "Newest Version of Apache Completes First Flight," press release, October 18, 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/270920/newest_version_of_apache_completes_first_flight. According to the U.S. Space Development Agency (SDA), Link 16 is a secure jam-resistant, high-speed digital data link network used by NATO and allied forces to exchange real-time tactical information—including voice, text, imagery, and situational data—between aircraft, ships, and ground forces. See SDA, "Link 16 Tactical Data Link Communication via Space: 'A Ground-Breaking Development,'" accessed March 6, 2026, https://www.sda.mil/link-16-tactical-data-link-communication-via-space-a-ground-breaking-development/.

[31] See AH-64E Apache specifications at Boeing, "AH-64 Apache," https://www.boeing.com/defense/military-rotorcraft/ah-64-apache#/.

[32] For more information, see Jacks George, "Built to Hunt: Apache Attack Helicopter's New 30mm Proximity Ammunition," U.S. Army, press release, February 12, 2026, https://www.army.mil/article/290491/built_to_hunt_apache_attack_helicopters_new_30mm_proximity_ammunition; Jack White, "US Apache pilots explain how helicopters are shooting down Iranian drones," *Task and Purpose*, March 11, 2026, https://taskandpurpose.com/tech-tactics/us-apache-pilots-drones/; and Eric Schmitt, "U.S. Shot Down Iranian Missiles and Drones Aimed at American Vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, Admiral Says," *New York Times*, May 4, 2026, https://www.nytimes.com/2026/05/04/us/politics/us-iran-attacks.html.

[33] U.S. Central Command, "U.S. Army Crew Safely Rescued After Helicopter Lost at Sea," press release, June 9, 2026, https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PUBLIC-RELEASES/Article/4511869/us-army-crew-safely-rescued-after-helicopter-lost-at-sea/; and Charlie D'Agata et al., "U.S. Apache Helicopter Shot Down by Iran, Trump Says; Crew Rescued by Sea Drone," *CBS News*, June 9, 2026, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/us-apache-helicopter-crash-strait-of-hormuz-first-sea-drone-rescue/.

[34] See "Mesa Site" video at Boeing, "AH-64 Apache," https://www.boeing.com/defense/military-rotorcraft/ah-64-apache#/.

UH-60/HH-60 Black Hawk

The Army operates six types of Black Hawk helicopters (see **Figure 2**), including the UH-60L, UH-60M, UH-60V, and HH-60M in the conventional Army and the MH-60DAP and MH-60K in special operations for air assault, logistics support, command and control, and MEDEVAC missions. The Black Hawk, operational since 1979, can carry 11 combat-loaded troops.[35] Lockheed Martin manufactures the UH-60 at production facilities in Stratford, CT.[36]

Figure 2. UH-60 Black Hawk



Source: Figure from Lockheed Martin, "UH-60M BLACK HAWK® Helicopter," accessed February 22, 2026, https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/products/sikorsky-uh-60m-black-hawk-helicopter.html.

The UH-60M variant aircraft, full-rate production of which began in 2007, comprises the largest proportion of the Army Black Hawk fleet.[37] The Army said it plans to keep the UH-60M in service "well beyond 2050" and is looking for ways to integrate autonomy, artificial intelligence (AI), and Launched Effects into the fleet.[38] The UH-60V was a recapitalization program for UH-60L helicopters to extend the life of the aircraft, add a digital cockpit that displays flight information on screens, instead of mechanical gauges and dials, and add more advanced flight and mission planning systems.[39]

CH-47 Chinook

The CH-47 (see **Figure 3**) is a heavy-lift transport helicopter that entered into service in 1962 and is designed for air assault, air movement, casualty evacuation, aerial recovery, and area resupply

[35] U.S. Army, PEO Aviation, "40 Years of Aviation Service: The Black Hawk Helicopter," press release, October 31, 2018, https://www.army.mil/article/213155/40_years_of_aviation_service_the_black_hawk_helicopter; and U.S. Army, PEO Aviation, "Utility Helicopter UH-60M," August 25, 2020, https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2020/09/25/671d7a5a/black-hawk-v3.pdf.

[36] U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), "Contracts for October 28, 2024," https://www.war.gov/News/Contracts/Contract/Article/3948301/contracts-for-oct-28-2024/. (DOD is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.)

[37] U.S. Army, PEO Aviation, "Utility Helicopter UH-60M." For more information, see **Appendix A**.

[38] Aaron Kia, "Army Seeks Industry Input on Black Hawk Modernization and Sustainment Program," U.S. Army, press release, December 19, 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/289724/army_seeks_industry_input_on_black_hawk_modernization_and_sustainment_program. For more information, see "Launched Effects" section.

[39] DOD, Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E), *FY2020 Annual Report*, January 2021, pp. 113-115, https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/FY2020/other/2020DOTEAnnualReport.pdf?ver=rvLsaCQ_njLmPDrNIFJBWQ%3d%3d.

missions.[40] It weighs about 25,000 pounds and can carry a maximum weight of 50,000 pounds.[41] It is powered by two Honeywell T55 engines.[42] The Army is modernizing CH-47F Block I aircraft and MH-47G special operations aircraft to a Block II configuration that allows it to carry up to 54,000 pounds and fly farther than earlier configurations.[43] Block II has a new avionics system that uses a modular open-systems approach to allow for technological upgrades made by different vendors, including semiautonomous flight capabilities.[44] According to the Army, the CH-47F and MH-47G will remain the "lone heavy lift helicopter[s] for the next several decades."[45] Boeing assembles the Chinook primarily in Ridley Park, PA.[46]

Figure 3. CH-47 Chinook



Source: Figure from Rita Hess, "CH-47 Working Group's oversight earns award," U.S. Army, March 8, 2018, https://www.army.mil/article/201843/ch_47_working_groups_oversight_earns_award.

UH-72 Lakota

The UH-72 Lakota Light Utility Helicopter (see **Figure 4**), a variant of the Airbus H-145, is a twin-engine, single-main-rotor helicopter with seating for two pilots and up to eight passengers. The Lakota has served as the Army's initial-entry training helicopter since 2015.[47] In August

[40] DOD, DOT&E, *FY2025 Annual Report*, March 2026, pp. 63-64, https://www.dote.osd.mil/Portals/97/pub/reports/FY2025/Other/2025Annual-Report.pdf.

[41] U.S. Army, "Army CH-47 Chinook Helicopter," press release, accessed May 12, 2026, https://www.127wg.ang.af.mil/About-127th-Wing/Fact-Sheets/Article/3694458/army-ch-47-chinook-helicopter/.

[42] Brigitte Rox, "Army Depot, Honeywell Complete 1,000 CH-47 Engines," U.S. Army, press release, January 23, 2018, https://www.army.mil/article/199450/army_depot_honeywell_complete_1000_ch_47_engines.

[43] U.S. Army, *Department of War (DOW) Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army*, *Volume 1 of 1*, p. 56.

[44] U.S. Army, "Army Accelerates Capability to the Force with a Rapid Fielding Effort for Chinook Block II," press release, September 30, 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/288833/army_accelerates_capability_to_the_force_with_a_rapid_fielding_effort_for_chinook_block_ii.

[45] U.S. Army, *Department of War Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, p. 56.

[46] U.S. Army, "The Legend Evolves: Army Awards Lot 6 for Rapid Fielding of Next-Generation CH-47F," press release, May 4, 2026, https://www.army.mil/article/292177/the_legend_evolves_army_awards_lot_6_for_rapid_fielding_of_next_generation_ch_47f.

[47] Airbus, "UH-72 Lakota," accessed May 12, 2026, https://www.airbus.com/en/products-services/helicopters/military-helicopters/uh-72-lakota.

2026, the Army selected M1 Support Services to provide contractor-owned and contractor-operated training services under the Flight School Next pilot training program.[48] The ARNG currently trains its pilots using the Army-owned UH-72 for homeland defense missions. Airbus Helicopters manufactures Lakota helicopters in Columbus, MS.[49]

Figure 4. UH-72 Lakota



Source: Figure from U.S. Army, "UH-72A LAKOTA," November 4, 2014, https://www.army.mil/article/137585/uh_72a_lakota.

Crewed Fixed-Wing Aviation Systems

In FY2022, the Army created an aerial-intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (A-ISR) strategy to modernize its fleet of fixed-wing A-ISR aircraft to seek more capable, higher-flying sensors to meet longer-range needs of commanders in the Pacific. The Army had for decades operated the EO-5 Airborne Reconnaissance Low-Multifunction aircraft, the RC-12 Guardrail signals intelligence aircraft, and the MC-12S Enhanced Medium Altitude Reconnaissance and Surveillance System-Multiple.[50] In 2021, the Army contracted for A-ISR services—which informed a future procurement of government-owned, government operated aircraft. The Army began divestment of the three platforms in 2023 and completed the process in FY2025.[51]

The Army acquired several types of contractor-owned, contractor-operated aircraft on an interim basis in 2021 in preparation for procuring a new fleet of fixed-wing ISR aircraft. Those included the following:

[48] U.S. Army, "Army Announces Flight School Next Selection to Modernize Aviator Training," press release, August 13, 2026, https://www.army.mil/article/294614/army_announces_flight_school_next_selection_to_modernize_aviator_training; and Carley Welch "Army Picks M1 to Lead Flight School Next Pilot Training Program," *Breaking Defense*, August 14, 2026, https://breakingdefense.com/2026/08/army-picks-m1-to-lead-flight-school-next-pilot-training-program/.

[49] Airbus, "UH-72 Lakota."

[50] Daniel Baldwin, "Army Completes A-ISR Turboprop Fleet Divestment," U.S. Army, press release, December 11, 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/289532/army_completes_a_isr_turboprop_fleet_divestment.

[51] Baldwin, "Army Completes A-ISR Turboprop Fleet Divestment."

- **Airborne Reconnaissance and Targeting Exploitation Multi-Mission Intelligence System (ARTEMIS).** The Army leased Bombardier Challenger 650s from Leidos for the ARTEMIS.[52]
- **Aerial Reconnaissance and Electronic Warfare System (ARES).** The Army leased a Bombardier Global 6000 aircraft modified with sensors from L3 Harris Technologies for its ARES effort.[53]
- **Army Theater-Level High Altitude Expeditionary Next Aerial-Signals Intelligence (ATHENA-R/S).** In 2023, the Army awarded prime contractor MAG Aerospace and L3Harris Technologies a contract to deliver two enhanced aircraft for ATHENA-Radar.[54] The Army is also using two contractor-owned, contractor-operated Bombardier Global 6500 aircraft from Sierra Nevada Corporation (SNC) for Athena-Sensor.[55]

These efforts—ARTEMIS, ARES, and ATHENA—demonstrated how the Army might use more powerful sensors with an extended loitering, or hovering, capability at high altitudes. The Army has said the results informed plans to develop a new fleet of fixed-wing aircraft called the High Accuracy Detection and Exploitation System (HADES). In 2024, the Army awarded a contract to SNC to build the HADES fleet from a facility in Hagerstown, MD.[56] Army officials said the HADES aircraft would "possess speed, range, endurance-at-range, and altitude for deep sensing."[57] The Army had planned to operate 14 of the aircraft.[58] Reports suggest the proposed fleet may be reduced from 14 to 6 aircraft.[59] According to the Army, the first fully developed HADES prototype system is scheduled to be delivered in FY2026.[60]

[52] Colin Clark, "Army Puts Leidos Special Mission Plane Through Paces at Project Convergence, *Breaking Defense*, October 11, 2021, https://breakingdefense.com/2021/10/army-puts-leidos-special-mission-plane-through-paces-at-project-convergence/.

[53] Steve Trimble, "U.S. Army Deploys Second Surveillance Demonstrator Jet," *Aviation Week Intelligence Network*, May 5, 2022, https://aviationweek.com/defense/sensors-electronic-warfare/us-army-deploys-second-surveillance-demonstrator-jet.

[54] MAG Aero, "MAG Aerospace L3 Harris Team to Expand U.S. Army's Aerial ISR Capabilities," press release, August 21, 2023, https://www.magaero.com/mag-aerospace-l3-harris-team-to-expand-us-armys-aerial-isr-capabilities/.

[55] Sierra Nevada Corporation (SNC), "SNC Wins $554-Million Contract to Modernize U.S. Army's A-ISR Jets with RAPCON-X™," press release, November 14, 2023, https://www.sncorp.com/news-archive/snc-wins-554-million-contract-to-modernize-us-army-s-a-isr-jets-with-rapcon-x/.

[56] Brian Everstine, "U.S. Army Selects Sierra Nevada Corp. To Build ISR Fleet," *Aviation Week Intelligence Network*, August 22, 2024, https://aviationweek.com/defense/sensors-electronic-warfare/us-army-selects-sierra-nevada-corp-build-isr-fleet.

[57] Jacob Kohrs, "HADES Modernizes Aerial Military Intelligence," U.S. Army, press release, March 30, 2023, https://www.army.mil/article/265353/hades_modernizes_aerial_military_intelligence.

[58] Kohrs, "HADES Modernizes Aerial Military Intelligence."

[59] Carley Welch, "SNC Buys First Non-prototype Bombardier Jet for Army HADES Program," *Breaking Defense*, January 13, 2026, https://breakingdefense.com/2026/01/snc-buys-first-non-prototype-bombardier-jet-for-army-hades-program/; and Carley Welch and Ashley Roque, "Army Eyes More HADES Jets, But Program Isn't 'Full Steam Ahead,'" *Breaking Defense*, January 29, 2026, https://breakingdefense.com/2026/01/army-eyes-more-hades-jets-but-program-isnt-full-steam-ahead/.

[60] Baldwin, "Army Completes A-ISR Turboprop Fleet Divestment."

Developmental Crewed Aviation Systems

MV-75 Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA)

The Army is developing the MV-75 Cheyenne II (see **Figure 5**) to serve as a next-generation aircraft for vertical lift, air assault, maritime interdiction, aeromedical evacuation, combat search and rescue, humanitarian relief, and tactical resupply.[61] Tilt-rotor aircraft such as the MV-75 take off and land vertically akin to a helicopter and tilt their prop rotors forward to fly as an airplane does. The Army seeks to develop an MV-75 that can reach speeds of up to 280 knots—compared with the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter's cruising speed of 151 knots—and at ranges of at least 1,700 nautical miles (nm) without refueling, to better enable operations in the Pacific region.[62]

Figure 5. MV-75 Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA)



Source: Figure from U.S. Army, "Army Designates MV-75 as Mission Design Series for Future Long Range Assault Aircraft," May 27, 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/285828/army_designates_mv_75_as_mission_design_series_for_future_long_range_assault_aircraft.

The MV-75 should be able to fly at altitudes of 6,000 feet and in temperatures of up to 95 degrees Fahrenheit.[63] Other attributes include enabling scalable autonomous flight, as enabled by its fly-by-wire flight controls (i.e., dependent on flight control computers rather than manual controls); enabling deployment of autonomous kinetic and non-kinetic Launched Effects; increasing the payload to deliver a full 12-soldier rifle squad and their equipment; and enabling self-transport

[61] U.S. Army, PEO Aviation, "Army Designates MV-75 as Mission Design Series for Future Long Range Assault Aircraft," U.S. Army, press release, May 27, 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/285828/army_designates_mv_75_as_mission_design_series_for_future_long_range_assault_aircraft; and Andrew Lightsey IV, "Army Announces Cheyenne Tribe Honored By MV-75 Helicopter," U.S. Army, press release, April 15, 2026, https://www.army.mil/article/291753/army_announces_cheyenne_tribe_honored_by_mv_75_helicopter.

[62] CRS In Focus IF12771, *Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA)*, by Jennifer DiMascio; and U.S. Congress, House Committee on Armed Services (HASC), Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces, *Army Aviation Rebalancing and the Path Ahead*, hearing, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., March 6, 2024, https://www.congress.gov/index.php/event/118th-congress/house-event/116920/.

[63] CRS In Focus IF12771, *Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA)*, by Jennifer DiMascio.

worldwide without strategic airlift.[64] According to the Army, the MV-75 would add speed and range to MEDEVAC missions.[65]

The Army has contracted with Bell Textron (Bell) to build a MV-75 prototype based on Textron's V-280 demonstrator aircraft, also a tilt-rotor design.[66] The U.S. Marine Corps, Navy, and Air Force operate another tilt-rotor aircraft, the V-22 Osprey.

In 2024, the Army had planned for the first flight of a prototype aircraft in 2026 and initial fielding of the aircraft in 2030.[67] The Army stated it plans to accelerate production and has negotiated an agreement with Bell to concurrently alter each prototype based on results of testing and evaluation. In 2025, the Army stated its plans to begin receiving prototypes in December 2026. Bell at that time reported plans to deliver the prototypes in FY2027.[68]

The Army is reportedly drafting requirements for a future MV-75 modernization effort, which could include plans for an autonomous version.[69]

Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS)

Small UAS

Small UAS historically have been the responsibility of individual soldiers and units, not of the Army Aviation branch. Under ATI, the Aviation branch established training and career opportunities related to small UAS. In 2026, for example, the Army established the role of Tactical UAS Specialist, or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 15X, within the Aviation branch for soldiers who specialize in operating, repairing, modifying, and inspecting Group 1-3 UAS—uncrewed aircraft that weigh less than 1,320 pounds.[70] The Army expects an estimated 2,100 soldiers to train in the 15X career field.[71] Beyond the Aviation branch, the Army's

[64] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

[65] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

[66] CRS In Focus IF12771, *Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA)*, by Jennifer DiMascio.

[67] U.S. Army, PEO Aviation, "FLRAA Achieves Milestone B, Enters Next Phase of Development," press release, August 2, 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/278591/flraa_achieves_milestone_b_enters_next_phase_of_development.

[68] Jen Judson, "Army Scrutinizes Supply Chain Risks to Deliver MV-75 by 2027," *Defense News*, October 13, 2025. https://www.defensenews.com/land/2025/10/13/army-scrutinizes-supply-chain-risks-to-deliver-mv-75-aircraft-by-2027/.

[69] Steve Trimble, "U.S. Army Aviation Doubles Down on Autonomy Vision," *Aviation Week Intelligence Network*, February 24, 2026.

[70] U.S. Army, "10-15X. MOS 15X—Tactical Unmanned Aircraft System (TUAS) Specialist, CMF 15 (Effective 202610)," accessed on February 27, 2026, https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2026/01/13/fb3bc9a7/15x.pdf. DOD classifies uncrewed aircraft according to five *groups* based on the aircraft's size and operational attributes, with Group 1 being the smallest. For more information, see CRS In Focus IF12797, *Defense Primer: Categories of Uncrewed Aircraft Systems*, by Daniel M. Gettinger.

[71] Clair A. Gill, "Army Aviation and Transforming with a Vision," *Aviation Digest* (Winter 2026), https://www.lineofdeparture.army.mil/Journals/Aviation-Digest/Aviation-Digest-Archive/Winter-2026/Army-Aviation-and-Transforming-with-a-Vision/.

Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE) develops requirements for small UAS and conducts small UAS training.[72]

Launched Effects

Beginning in the 2000s, the Army developed the capability, originally known as Manned-Unmanned Teaming, that allowed Apache pilots to use a UAS to reconnoiter ahead of a helicopter to identify potential targets and surface-to-air threats.[73] Under the Launched Effects program, the Army is seeking to further integrate uncrewed aircraft into air and ground operations by developing a Launched Effects family of UAS to extend "the speed, range, lethality and survivability" of aviation and ground maneuver forces.[74] As envisioned by the Army, the Launched Effects family of systems would consist of short-, medium-, and long-range UAS equipped with lethal and nonlethal payloads for conducting one of several possible missions, such as gathering intelligence, serving as decoys, disrupting communications, or conducting lethal or nonlethal attacks.[75]

MQ-1C Gray Eagle

The General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI) MQ-1C Gray Eagle is a multi-mission, medium-altitude, long-endurance UAS. The Army introduced the MQ-1C Gray Eagle in 2009 and a modified version of the MQ-1C, the Gray Eagle Extended Range (GE-ER), in the late 2010s.[76] The primary mission of the Gray Eagle is to "provide dedicated mission-configured UAS support to division combat aviation, fires, and battlefield surveillance brigades, BCTs, and other Army and joint force units," according to the Army.[77] The Army has 15 Gray Eagle companies, of

[72] John Dudas, "Who Owns the Drones? Why Modernization of Army Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems Should Be a Maneuver Responsibility," *U.S. Army Modern War Institute* (blog), West Point, March 18, 2026, https://mwi.westpoint.edu/who-owns-the-drones-why-modernization-of-army-small-unmanned-aircraft-systems-should-be-a-maneuver-responsibility/.

[73] Kimberly Henry, "Apache Helicopter Pilots Get Visual Aid," U.S. Army, press release, February 19, 2008, https://www.army.mil/article/7494/apache_helicopter_pilots_get_visual_aid/.

[74] U.S. Army, *Department of War Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation, Army, Budget Activity 5D*, *Volume 3*, p. 251.

[75] Brock Daugherty, "Advancing Army Innovation: Special User Demonstration Highlights the Future of Launched Effects Technology," U.S. Army, press release, September 30, 2025, https://www.army.mil/article/288835/advancing_.

[76] DOD, *Selected Acquisition Report, MQ-1C Gray Eagle Unmanned Aircraft System (MQ-1C Gray Eagle)*, December 2018, p. 9, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Selected_Acquisition_Reports/FY_2018_SARS/19-F-1098_DOC_52_MQ-1C_Gray_Eagle_SAR_Dec_2018.pdf; and DOD, *Selected Acquisition Report, MQ-1C Gray Eagle Unmanned Aircraft System (MQ-1C Gray Eagle)*, December 2009, p. 7, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Selected_Acquisition_Reports/17-F-0571_FY2009_SARS/MQ-1C%20Gray%20Eagle_SAR_Dec_2009.pdf.

[77] U.S. Army, *FM 3-04 Army Aviation*, p. 111.

which 11 are assigned to AC CABs and 4 to military intelligence and special operations units.[78] The ARNG reportedly may begin fielding the Gray Eagle MQ-1C-25M in 2027.[79]

Developmental Uncrewed Systems

Until its retirement in 2024, the Textron RQ-7 Shadow provided Army Aviation CABs with a UAS asset for collecting intelligence.[80] Under the Future Tactical UAS (FTUAS) program, initiated in 2018, the Army had planned to acquire a successor to the Shadow. The Army cancelled the FTUAS program in 2025.[81] Although the Army continues to have a requirement for a Group 3 UAS—an aircraft with a maximum takeoff weight between 55 and 1,320 pounds—it has not announced plans for a new competition. In August 2026, the Army stated that it had expanded its UAS Marketplace, an Army initiative to allow units to procure and test a variety of systems to meet mission needs, to include Group 3 UAS.[82]

The Army also plans to acquire a replacement for the Gray Eagle. The Army may require that, unlike the Gray Eagle, the successor aircraft be able to operate independently of runways, as in either a short takeoff and landing UAS or a vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL)-capable aircraft. In 2025, the Army launched the "Group 4+ UAS Short/Vertical Takeoff and Landing (S/VTOL) Challenge" to communicate its requirements to and solicit feedback from potential suppliers of the planned successor to the Gray Eagle.[83]

Army Aviation Restructuring Plans

In 2024 and 2025, the Army announced plans to implement changes to the force structure and size of the Army Aviation branch, the first such changes since the 2014 ARI. These changes included ending certain Army aircraft procurement and development programs, retiring aircraft, and reducing the number of CABs. The 2024 Aviation Investment Rebalance effort focused on cuts to aircraft programs, and the 2025 Army Transformation Initiative proposed changes to force structure. Both plans emphasized investments in uncrewed aircraft. In January 2026, Major General Clair A. Gill, the then commander of the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence, wrote

[78] DOD, *MQ-1C Gray Eagle Unmanned Aircraft System (MQ-1C Gray Eagle)*, December 2019, p. 7, https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/FOID/Reading%20Room/Selected_Acquisition_Reports/FY_2019_SARS/20-F-0568_DOC_58_MQ-1C_Gray_Eagle_SAR_Dec_2019_Full.pdf; and U.S. Army, *Department of the Army, Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army, Volume 1*, p. 114. Congress has directed DOD to acquire the Gray Eagle for the ARNG. In enacted defense appropriations acts for FY2023, FY2025, and FY2026 (P.L. 117-328, P.L. 119-4, and P.L. 119-75, respectively), Congress provided more funds than DOD requested to procure a variant of the Gray Eagle, the Gray Eagle 25M, for the ARNG.

[79] General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI), "Army National Guard Brings New Gray Eagle MDO to States and Infantry Divisions," press release, April 4, 2025, https://www.ga-asi.com/army-national-guard-brings-new-gray-eagle-mdo-to-states-and-infantry-divisions.

[80] For more information, see U.S. Army, "Rq-7b Shadow Tactical Unmanned Aircraft System (TUAS)," press release, November 4, 2014, https://www.army.mil/article/137609/rq_7b_shadow_tactical_unmanned_aircraft_system_tuas.

[81] Jen Judson, "Army Halts Tactical UAS Competition Without Clear Plan Forward," *Defense News*, May 16, 2025, https://www.defensenews.com/land/2025/05/16/army-halts-tactical-uas-competition-without-clear-plan-forward/.

[82] U.S. Army, "Drone Marketplace Goes Live, Expands Functionality," press release, August 14, 2026, https://www.army.mil/article/291297/us_army_launches_online_marketplace_to_revolutionize_drone_acquisition.

[83] U.S. General Services Administration, SAM.gov, "PM UAS - Short/Vertical Takeoff and Landing (S/VTOL)," accessed February 26, 2026, https://sam.gov/opp/09cea69fbbef4f9dbe747eda5ec9e0ed/view.

that Army Aviation's organizational changes are intended "to harvest the very best of our talent and enduring fleet, while tailoring our force structure to better support multidomain operations."[84]

2024 Aviation Investment Rebalance[85]

On February 8, 2024, the Army announced plans to "rebalance its aviation modernization investments across new and enduring platforms," including by ending certain aircraft production and development programs. As part of this rebalance, the Army stated it would

> End development of the Army's new manned reconnaissance helicopter, the Future Attack and Reconnaissance Aircraft (FARA), at the conclusion of FY24 prototyping activities.
>
> End production of the UH-60V version of the [Black Hawk], which extends service life of existing airframes by 10 years, after FY24 due to significant cost growth.
>
> Delay entering production of the Improved Turbine Engine (ITEP) to ensure adequate time to integrate it with AH-64 and UH-60 platforms.
>
> Phase out operations and sustainment of the legacy Shadow and Raven unmanned aircraft systems.[86]

The Army stated that these decisions would "free up resources to make critical new investments in Army aviation.[87] The Army further noted that as part of this rebalancing, it would

> Commit to a new multi-year contract to procure the UH-60M Blackhawk helicopter – a new airframe with a 20+ year service life – and invest in upgrades for the Blackhawk.
>
> End uncertainty over the future of the CH-47F Block II Chinook by formally entering it into production, with a path to full rate production in the future.
>
> Continue the Future Long Range Assault Aircraft (FLRAA) program as planned, ensuring the Army remains on a path to field the first operational unit in FY30.
>
> Increase investments in research and development to expand and accelerate the Army's unmanned aerial reconnaissance capability including future tactical unmanned aerial systems and launched effects.[88]

2025 Army Transformation Initiative (ATI)[89]

On May 1, 2025, the then Secretary of the Army and then Chief of Staff of the Army published "Letter to the Force: Army Transformation Initiative" to implement "a comprehensive

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[84] Clair A. Gill, "Army Aviation and Transforming with a Vision," *Aviation Digest*, January 1, 2026, https://www.lineofdeparture.army.mil/Journals/Aviation-Digest/Aviation-Digest-Archive/Winter-2026/Army-Aviation-and-Transforming-with-a-Vision/; and CRS In Focus IF11409, *Defense Primer: Army Multi-Domain Operations (MDO)*, by Andrew Feickert.

[85] Information in this section, unless otherwise stated, is taken from U.S. Army Public Affairs, "Army Announces Aviation Investment Rebalance," press release, February 8, 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/273594/army_announces_aviation_investment_rebalance.

[86] U.S. Army, "Army Announces Aviation Investment Rebalance."

[87] U.S. Army, "Army Announces Aviation Investment Rebalance."

[88] U.S. Army Public Affairs, "Army Announces Aviation Investment Rebalance."

[89] For additional information, see CRS Report R48606, *2025 Army Transformation Initiative (ATI) Force Structure and Organizational Proposals: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Andrew Feickert.

transformation strategy" for the Army overall, referred to as the Army Transformation Initiative.[90] The ATI "Letter to the Force" outlined initial plans to transform the Army's force structure, organization, and weapons systems. In terms of Army Aviation, the letter directed the Army to

- develop the FLRAA;
- restructure Army Aviation by reducing one Aerial Cavalry Squadron per CAB in the AC;
- divest two USAR ECABs, eliminating more than 3,000 positions and 180 UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and transferring modernized UH-60Ms to the Air National Guard;
- consolidate 660 aviation sustainment personnel to increase operational readiness; and
- cancel procurement of what the Army described as "outdated" crewed attack aircraft, such as the AH-64D, and "obsolete" UAS, such as the Gray Eagle.

Under ATI, the Army plan for the Aviation branch would inactivate or convert all Air Cavalry Squadrons (ACS), establish UAS and Launched Effects companies in Attack Battalions (ABs), and continue to shift reconnaissance missions from crewed helicopters to uncrewed systems. The Army would reallocate AH-64E attack helicopters across ABs and retire 133 older-model AH-64Ds and low-rate production AH-64Es.[91] According to the Army, the updated CAB design would improve aircraft availability and reduce the sustainment burden by reallocating 660 maintenance personnel within CABs, allocating operational float (spare) aircraft to improve readiness, and standardizing MEDEVAC company structures.[92]

In Army Aviation's RC, the Army proposed eliminating the USAR rotary-wing aviation mission by deactivating the two USAR ECABs, including the USAR's MEDEVAC companies. The change would reduce 3,277 authorized military positions and 180 aircraft (i.e., UH-60L, CH-47F, and HH-60M).[93] According to the Army, these decisions reflected the training, readiness, and modernization demands associated with aviation units, which the Army assessed were better sustained within full-time or regionally aligned formations and not the USAR.[94] The ARNG would retain an aviation role under ATI and absorb the active-duty USAR MEDEVAC companies.[95]

The Army would also reduce the number of Gray Eagle aircraft allocated to each Gray Eagle Company and HH-60M Black Hawk (MEDEVAC) aircraft assigned to each MEDEVAC company.[96] Modernized aircraft would be redistributed from the AC to ARNG units to preserve their ability to support both federal operations and domestic response missions.[97] According to the

[90] U.S. Army, "Army Transformation Initiative," accessed January 31, 2026, https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2025/05/01/c4c9539c/letter-to-the-force-army-transformation-initiative.pdf.

[91] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information. The change would divest the fleet of 91 AH-64D Apaches and 42 AH-64E Apaches.

[92] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

[93] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

[94] Information provided by the Army on January 14, 2026, in response to a CRS request for information.

[95] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

[96] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

[97] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

Army, the smaller structure would allow for the integration of the MV-75, which would bridge a gap in long-range MEDEVACs for the Joint Force.

Air Cavalry Squadron (ACS) Deactivations

The Army said it would inactivate or convert 11 ACS units between FY2025 and FY2027, including

- 3-17 ACS at Hunter Army Airfield, GA, which would convert to the 1-3 AB, and the 1-3 AB in Germany that would reflag as 2-159 AB;[98]
- 7-17 ACS at Fort Hood, TX;
- 1-6 ACS at Fort Riley, KS;
- 5-17 ACS at Camp Humphreys, Republic of Korea (ROK);
- 6-6 ACS at Fort Drum, NY;
- 4-6 ACS at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, WA;
- 1-17 ACS at Fort Bragg, NC;
- 2-17 ACS at Fort Campbell, KY;
- 3-6 ACS at Fort Bliss, TX;
- 2-6 ACS at Wheeler Army Airfield, HI, which would convert to 1-25 AB, and 1-25 AB would reflag as 1-229 AB; and
- 6-17 ACS at Fort Carson, CO.[99]

FY2027 Army Budget Request

The Army requests funding for aviation activities in various parts of the budget, including military personnel (MILPERS) accounts to provide pay and benefits to pilots and other personnel; operation and maintenance (O&M) accounts to pay for training and operations of aviation units; and research, development, test, and evaluation (RDT&E) and procurement to develop and acquire new and upgraded aircraft.

The Army's FY2027 budget requested $3.1 billion in procurement and $2.4 billion in RDT&E funding for aviation programs, projects, and activities.[100] The Army's FY2027 budget requested O&M funding to support 3,086 rotary- and fixed-wing aircraft in FY2027, 213 fewer aircraft than in FY2026; 24,435 AC officer and enlisted personnel, 1,953 fewer than in FY2026; and 26,330 RC officer and enlisted personnel, 63 more than in FY2026.[101] Relative to staffing levels in FY2025, the Army's FY2027 budget proposed a reduction of 6,264 aviation personnel in the AC.

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[98] The Army uses the term *reflag* to describe how it transfers personnel and equipment after a unit is deactivated. See Janice McKenney, *Reflagging in the Army*, U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1997, https://history.army.mil/Portals/143/UnitHistory/Reflagging%20the%20Army.pdf?ver=8o5pq85siZLnlaDNprilHg%3D%3D#page=6.

[99] Information provided by the Army on January 14, 2026, in response to a CRS request for information.

[100] CRS analysis of DOD data provided to CRS in response to a CRS request for information on May 5, 2026, and on file with the authors.

[101] CRS analysis of U.S. Army, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army, Volume I*, April 2026, pp. 133, 136; U.S. Army, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army* (continued...)

Rotary-Wing Aircraft in the Army FY2027 Budget Request

The Army requested funds to procure one UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter, materials for five MH-47G aircraft, and support for CH-47F digital cockpit sustainment. The Army did not request funding to procure additional Apache aircraft in its FY2027 budget request to Congress; the service expected to receive deliveries for 31 aircraft funded with FY2025 appropriations—the last year for which the Army requested funding for Apache procurement.[102]

Under the Army Future Years Defense Program (FYDP) in its FY2027 budget request, the Army projected it would procure fewer Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters than previously planned. Under the FYDP in the Army's FY2025 budget request, the Army projected it would procure 24 Black Hawks and 9 Chinooks annually through FY2029.[103] In its FY2027 FYDP, the Army projected buying no Black Hawks and 1 Chinook annually through FY2029.[104]

The FY2027 Army budget requested $127 million in advance procurement funding to buy long-lead materials and equipment to support the purchase of eight initial MV-75 aircraft in FY2028.[105] The Army sought $2.1 billion in RDT&E funding to continue building and integrating prototype aircraft and to initiate prototype testing.[106] According to the Army, initial production is scheduled to begin in 2028 with delivery in mid-2029.[107]

Crewed Fixed-Wing Aircraft and Sensors in the Army FY2027 Budget Request

In FY2027, the Army asked for $227 million to procure one Bombardier Global 6500 aircraft and sensor suites for previously purchased aircraft. The sensor suites would be carried by Micro High-Altitude Balloon Systems (MHABS). These small balloons are low-cost, stealthy platforms that can be quickly launched by tactical units—outfitted with multiple types of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance sensors or communications equipment—including MHABS.

Reserve, Volume 1, April 2026, pp. 91-92; and U.S. Army, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army National Guard, Volume 1*, April 2026, pp. 103, 105 (figures include contractor-owned, contractor-operated aircraft in the Active Component [AC]). AC personnel reflect active military end strength figures for FY2026-FY2027. ARNG and USAR personnel reflect the reserve drill end strength figures for FY2026-FY2027.

[102] U.S. Army, *Department of War Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, April 2026, p. 29, https://www.asafm.army.mil/Portals/72/Documents/BudgetMaterial/2027/Discretionary%20Budget/Procurement/Aircraft_Procurement_Army.pdf; and U.S. Army, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Budget Estimates, Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, June 2025, p. 14, https://www.asafm.army.mil/Portals/72/Documents/BudgetMaterial/2026/Discretionary%20Budget/Procurement/Aircraft%20Procurement%20Army.pdf.

[103] U.S. Army, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, March 2024, p. 39, https://www.asafm.army.mil/Portals/72/Documents/BudgetMaterial/2025/Base%20Budget/Procurement/Aircraft-Procurement-Army.pdf.

[104] U.S. Army, *Department of War (DOW) Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army*, *Volume 1 of 1*, pp. 42, 58.

[105] U.S. Army, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, p. 35.

[106] U.S. Army, *Department of War Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Research, Development, Test & Evaluation, Army, Budget Activity 5D,* p. 86.

[107] Information provided by the Army on October 23, 2025, in response to a CRS request for information.

According to Army budget documents, these sensors would address a gap in supporting long-range precision fires.[108]

Uncrewed Aircraft in the Army FY2027 Budget Request

The Army requested a total of approximately $399.6 million and $875.0 million in procurement and RDT&E funding, respectively, for various UAS programs.[109] These amounts included a requested $46.9 million in procurement and $488.8 million in RDT&E funds for brigade-level UAS and Group 4+ UAS S/VTOL aircraft—potential successors to the RQ-7 Shadow and MQ-1C Gray Eagle.[110]

Legislative Activity

Some Members of Congress have expressed concerns with aspects of the Army's aviation rebalancing plans. For example, on February 6, 2024, Representative Rob Wittman, chair of the Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces of the House Committee on Armed Services (HASC), said, "The Army's enormous aviation program changes require serious scrutiny from Congress" and pledged to review how the service planned to address the aviation attack and reconnaissance mission without the Future Attack and Reconnaissance Aircraft (FARA).[111] On March 6, 2024, the subcommittee held a hearing with Army witnesses on the topic.[112]

The Senate Committee on Armed Services (SASC), in a report (S.Rept. 118-188) accompanying its reported version of a National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2025 (S. 4638), directed the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review and assess the Army's aviation plans.[113] In the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 (P.L. 119-4, Division A, Title IV), Congress supported the Army's proposal to cancel FARA and provided more funding than requested for certain types of Army aircraft, including the UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter and MQ-1C Gray Eagle UAS (for the ARNG).[114]

The Army's proposed restructuring of Army Aviation was the subject of questioning in congressional hearings on the Army's FY2027 budget request. In May 2026, Representative Rosa

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[108] U.S. Army, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates*, *Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, p. 17.

[109] CRS analysis of information provided by DOD on May 4, 2026, in response to a CRS request for information and on file with the authors.

[110] DOD, *Department of War Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Aircraft Procurement, Army, Volume 1 of 1*, pp. 12-14; and DOD, *Department of War Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Research, Development, Test & Evaluation, Army, Budget Activity 5D, Volume 3d of 3,* April 2026, p. 244, https://www.asafm.army.mil/Portals/72/Documents/BudgetMaterial/2027/Discretionary%20Budget/rdte/RDTE%20-%20Vol%203%20-%20Budget%20Activity%205D.pdf.

[111] Rep. Rob Wittman, "Wittman Statement on Army Decision to End Development of Future Attack and Reconnaissance Aircraft," press release, February 8, 2024, https://wittmanforms.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=5613.

[112] U.S. Congress, HASC, Subcommittee on Tactical Air and Land Forces, *Army Aviation Rebalancing and the Path Ahead*, hearing, 118th Cong., 2nd sess., March 6, 2024, https://www.congress.gov/event/118th-congress/house-event/116920?s=3&r=56.

[113] S.Rept. 118-188, pp. 22-23.

[114] DOD, DD 1414, Base for Reprogramming Actions, Division A of P.L. 119-4, Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, 2025, Effective: October 1, 2024, p. A-15, https://comptroller.war.gov/Portals/45/Documents/execution/FY_2025_DD_1414_Base_for_Reprogramming_Actions.pdf.

DeLauro, ranking minority member of the House Committee on Appropriations, expressed concern about the potential negative effects to the industrial base of the Army's proposal to curtail procurement of the Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters in its FY2027 budget.[115] Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth testified that the department would review the Army's proposed curtailment.[116] (The Secretary of Defense is using "Secretary of War" as a "secondary title" under Executive Order [EO] 14347 dated September 5, 2025.) That month, some Members of Congress wrote to Secretary Hegseth requesting that the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) provide a report on the industrial base impacts of the planned cuts to the procurement of Black Hawk and Chinook helicopters.[117] (DOD is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under EO 14347 dated September 5, 2025.)

Also in May, Representative Morgan Luttrell, a member of HASC, expressed concern about the Army's proposed deactivation of the two USAR ECABs.[118] Acting Chief of Staff of the Army General Christopher LaNeve testified that the Army had begun deactivating the ECABs and that the units had been reduced by 50%.[119] According to a press release from Representatives Morgan Luttrell, Jeff Crank, and Derek Tran (all members of HASC), the Army said it plans to deactivate the units by September 2026.[120]

Congressional Action in the 119th Congress

FY2026 Defense Authorizations

In addition to funding authorizations, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 (NDAA; P.L. 119-60) contained the following provisions related to Army pilot training and Army Aviation force structure:

Section 384 prohibited funding to implement Initial Entry Rotary Wing training until the Army and the Federal Aviation Administration completes a Part 141 Helicopter Flight School Training Pilot proof of concept plan and the Secretary of the Army assesses and validates the pilot's cost and effectiveness and submits the results to the congressional defense committees in a report and briefing.[121]

Section 1049 prohibited funding to retire, deactivate, schedule to deactivate, or reduce the capabilities or personnel for ECABs until the Secretary of the Army submits a report to the

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[115] U.S. Congress, House Committee on Appropriations (HAC), Subcommittee on Defense, *[FY2027] Budget Hearing - The Department of Defense*, hearing, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., May 12, 2026, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/live/0TubemiSC6U?si=g1fznY_aC9bmXI0P&t=3299.

[116] U.S. Congress, HAC, Subcommittee on Defense, *[FY2027] Budget Hearing - The Department of Defense*, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/live/0TubemiSC6U?si=VfihR-W33wL-s5vZ&t=5045.

[117] Letter from Rep. Rosa L. DeLauro et al. to Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, May 14, 2016, https://delauro.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/delauro-evo.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/05.14.2026-letter-from-rep-delauro-strong-and-colleagues.pdf.

[118] U.S. Congress, HASC, *Full Committee Hearing: Army FY27 Budget Request*, hearing, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., May 15, 2026, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/live/QtEuiAG6sA0?si=LH2yOmBQArNBiJwr&t=7832.

[119] U.S. Congress, HASC, *Hearing on the Army FY27 Budget Request*, 119th Cong., 2nd sess., May 15, 2026, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/live/QtEuiAG6sA0?si=hYfl6xwco63C8lq0&t=7756.

[120] Rep. Morgan Luttrell, "Luttrell, Colleagues Introduce Legislation to Prevent Deactivation of ECABs," press release, May 18, 2026, https://luttrell.house.gov/media/press-releases/luttrell-colleagues-introduce-legislation-prevent-deactivation-ecabs.

[121] P.L. 119-60, §384, pp. 131-132 (of the PDF).

congressional defense committees about the loss of potential capabilities associated with such retirement or deactivation and about the recapitalization of the aircraft used by ECABs specific to each unit and corresponding geographic location.[122]

Section 112 extended authority for the Army to enter into multiyear contracts to procure UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters.[123]

FY2026 Defense Appropriations

The Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75, Division A), provided $5.74 billion in discretionary funding in procurement and RDT&E accounts for Army aviation programs, projects, and activities.[124] Additionally, in Title II of the FY2025 reconciliation law (P.L. 119-21), also known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, Congress provided DOD mandatory funding for certain Army aviation programs.[125] In May 2026, DOD reported planning to allocate $1.09 billion of such funds to Army aviation procurement and RDT&E programs in FY2026.[126]

Section 8140 of P.L. 119-75 prohibited the transfer of funding from the UH-60 Black Hawk program and prohibited the use of funds to "pause, cancel, or terminate" the UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter program or to "prepare to pause, cancel, or terminate" the program.[127] The act provided $1.1 billion in procurement and RDT&E funding for the UH-60 program in FY2026.[128]

FY2027 Defense Authorizations (Proposed)

Army Transformation Initiative

Section 1084 of the HASC-reported version of an FY2027 NDAA (H.R. 8800) would require the Secretary of the Army to submit to the congressional defense committees an annual report "detailing the programmatic choices made to implement the Army Continuous Transformation initiative, the Army Transformation Initiative, and the Transformation in Contact Initiative" between February 15, 2027, and the same day in 2032. The provision would further direct the Secretary to annually brief the congressional defense committees on the elements of the report.

Proposed Deactivation of the Army Reserve ECABs

Section 1071 of the HASC-reported version of an FY2027 NDAA (H.R. 8800) would prohibit DOD from obligating funding authorized for appropriations between FY2027 and FY2031 to "retire, deactivate, schedule to deactivate, or proceed with any other action that would reduce the capabilities, resources, training, aircraft, or personnel available" for ECABs until the Secretary of

[122] P.L. 119-60, §1049, pp. 325-326 (of the PDF).

[123] P.L. 119-60, §112. FY2026 was the final year of a UH-60 multiyear procurement that began in FY2022.

[124] CRS analysis of DOD data provided to CRS in response to a CRS request for information on May 5, 2026, and on file with the authors.

[125] P.L. 119-21, Title II, §20010, p. 54.

[126] CRS analysis of DOD data provided in response to a CRS request for information on May 5, 2026, and on file with the authors.

[127] P.L. 119-75, Division A, §8140.

[128] For more information, see CRS Report R48860, *FY2026 Defense Budget: Funding for Selected Weapon Systems*, by Daniel M. Gettinger.

the Army certifies that the Army has a plan to recapitalize any aircraft for ECABs and submits the plan to the congressional defense committees.

UH-60 Black Hawk Inventory

The HASC report (H.Rept. 119-698) accompanying the committee-reported version of the FY2027 NDAA (H.R. 8800) directed the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of the National Guard Bureau to brief the committee on the UH-60L and UH-60M inventory; the plan to recapitalize UH-60L with UH-60M in the AC and RC; any challenges or delays to the effort, including funding and industrial base capacity; and a cost estimate to replace or modernize Black Hawk helicopters while maintaining or enhancing overall ARNG aviation readiness and operational capability.[129]

MV-75 Sustainment

The HASC report (H.Rept. 119-698) accompanying the committee-reported version of the FY2027 NDAA (H.R. 8800) directed the Comptroller General to report to the congressional defense committees on how the Army plans for future maintenance, repairs, logistics, and supply chain of the MV-75; the extent to which the Army is developing personnel, infrastructure, and facilities to sustain the aircraft; and how the Army will ensure it has the data rights it needs to allow soldiers to repair and maintain the aircraft.[130]

Army Small UAS Plans

The SASC report (S.Rept. 119-127) accompanying the committee-reported version of the FY2027 NDAA (S. 4784) included report language directing the Secretary of the Army to brief HASC and SASC on the Army's strategy for small UAS.[131]

FY2027 Defense Appropriations (Proposed)

Prohibition on Black Hawk Program Termination

Section 8132 of the House Appropriations Committee-reported version of a Defense Appropriations Act, 2027 (H.R. 9495), would prohibit procurement or RDT&E funding for the UH-60 Black Hawk from being reprogrammed or transferred for any other purpose. The provision would further prohibit the funding provided by the bill to be used "to pause, cancel, or terminate the UH-60 Black Hawk aircraft program or to prepare to pause, cancel, or terminate such program."

Potential Issues for Congress

The Army Aviation branch's modernization plans may affect unit organization and capabilities, the numbers and types of crewed and uncrewed aircraft the Army plans to procure, the number of pilots and maintenance and support personnel needed for the remaining uncrewed fleet, and the RC generally. Potential oversight issues for Congress include the following:

[129] H.Rept. 119-698, p. 5.

[130] H.Rept. 119-698, p. 129.

[131] S.Rept. 119-127, pp. 14-15.

Impact of Incorporating UAS into Army Aviation

Under the Aviation Investment Rebalance and ATI, the Army announced plans to introduce growing numbers of UAS and to shift some Aviation branch missions from crewed to uncrewed systems. Potential oversight issues for Congress include the goals and feasibility of such plans. Possible questions include the following:

- How might such a technology shift limit the Army from conducting certain types of missions or from operating in certain environments in the future? What new missions might this change enable?
- What is the Army's strategy for UAS? How could the Army incorporate UAS into the structure of Aviation units?
- What are the technical risks associated with the current UAS programs? What opportunities does the change represent?
- What potential alternative approaches has the Army considered relative to those of the current UAS programs?

Congress may consider questions relating to the cost and structure of Army aviation UAS programs. Topics may include Army cost estimates for operating and maintaining UAS, particularly the growing numbers of small UAS and Launched Effects. Congress may also consider whether or not the Aviation branch is structured with adequate company and battalion staff to plan and execute small UAS operations and the extent to which the costs of acquiring and sustaining small UAS are shared among other branches of the Army. Some observers contend that the United States is not adequately considering the use of low-cost drones in assessments of its capabilities.[132] Congress may or may not consider the speed and extent to which the Army is adopting UAS programs.

Congress may also consider questions relating to the sufficiency of the information available to Congress and the Army concerning the Army's small UAS programs. In a 2024 report, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) noted that the Army did not collect data on the availability of small UAS.[133] Topics Congress may consider include whether or not the Army has established policies to track and evaluate the performance of small UAS and the number and severity of mishaps and accidents and the development and retention of skilled personnel.

ATI Impact on RC Aviation

As previously noted, under the ATI, the Army planned to inactivate all USAR ECABs and rotary-wing aviation units. The Army's plan to eliminate USAR aviation and reduce the number of ARNG crewed aircraft could decrease overall Army aviation capability and availability. The Army has not publicly specified what, if any, force capability analysis it conducted to support its decision, what sort of risk is associated with the Army's RC aviation decisions, and whether or not the decisions were adequately communicated to Congress. Another consideration is whether or not the Army's RC aviation plans might increase the AC's aviation workload and the implications of any corresponding stress on AC aviation platforms, personnel, or local communities.

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[132] Paul Scharre, "Losing the War of the Future," *Foreign Affairs*, June 23, 2026, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/losing-war-future-paul-scharre.

[133] CBO, *Availability and Use of Aircraft in the Army*, p. 5.

Congress may or may not request information or studies to understand the benefits and risks of the restructuring of Army Aviation to capability, personnel, facilities, and systems.

Industrial Base Effects of Changing Army Helicopter and UAS Requirements

Following the ATI, the Army's FY2027 budget request proposed curtailing the procurement of legacy crewed helicopters. Reducing procurement of the Army's major helicopter programs could limit the parts supply chain for the older variants—the AH-64D and the UH-60L. Some say the change could create future sustainment challenges for international partners operating the AH-64D or the UH-60M.[134] One Member expressed concern that international partners may be disincentivized from procuring these aircraft if they conclude the United States is unlikely to continue procuring them.[135]

Another potential effect is on the industrial workforce. GAO noted in a 2025 report that ARNG maintainer shortages have affected availability of the Army's CH-47F Chinook.[136] While it is unclear whether or not changes in Army Aviation force structure would alleviate or exacerbate workforce shortages, Members may or may not seek further information about impacts to changing helicopter requirements to the legacy industrial base.

The Army's plan to accelerate fielding of the MV-75 tilt-rotor aircraft involves concurrent production and development. Although this plan could shield the program from proposed funding reductions during development, acceleration could pose potential costs and future schedule risks for the program. The then Army Secretary Daniel Driscoll stated on April 16, 2026, that the proposed funding to accelerate MV-75 is necessary to meet the range and speed needs of the Pacific region, adding that the nation needs to overinvest in FLRAA "to get it online as quickly as possible and then have it as part of a constellation of options that we have for different theaters."[137] Congress may consider providing oversight of the MV-75 cost, schedule, and concurrent development and production efforts and the interplay of the MV-75 schedule with proposed reductions to manned helicopter program procurement.

[134] Brian Everstine, "Boeing: U.S. Apache Plan Impacting International Market," *Aviation Week Intelligence Network*, February 2, 2026, https://aviationweek.com/defense/aircraft-propulsion/boeing-us-apache-plan-impacting-international-market; Carley Welch, "PEO Aviation 'Can't Speak' to Long-Term Future of UH-60Ms, Focusing on Upgrades, Maintenance," *Breaking Defense*, https://breakingdefense.com/2025/10/peo-aviation-cant-speak-to-long-term-future-of-uh-60ms-focusing-on-upgrades-maintenance/.

[135] U.S. Congress, HASC, *Full Committee Hearing: Army FY27 Budget Request*.

[136] GAO, *MILITARY READINESS Implementing GAO's Recommendations Can Help DOD Address Persistent Challenges Across Air, Sea, Ground, and Space Domains*, GAO-25-108104, March 12, 2025, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-25-108104.

[137] CQ Congressional Transcripts, "House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense Holds Hearing on Fiscal Year 2027 The United States Army Budget Request," April 16, 2026, https://plus.cq.com/doc/congressionaltranscripts-8442434?3.

Reduction in Requirements for Pilots and Aircraft Maintainers for Crewed Platforms

Reportedly, in the AC alone, the Army plans to eliminate 6,500 aviation positions, many of which are pilot positions.[138] An Army spokesman reportedly stated that "the move aims to realign the force toward the use of unmanned drones instead of manned aviation platforms and will occur over fiscal years 2026 and 2027."[139] Some note that rather than retraining to work on drones, pilots and aircraft maintainers could leave the Army for jobs in the civilian sector.[140] Others note that the Army reduced the MEDEVAC community in 2004 and reversed course five years later.[141] In light of the special requirements and training required for Army pilots and aircraft maintainers, Members could examine the impact of reductions in pilot and maintainer requirements.

Evolving Threats and the Future of Army Aviation

The Russia-Ukraine war has played a central role in the Army's thinking about the future of warfare and the Army itself, with some suggesting that the conflict has "exposed both the strengths and vulnerabilities of helicopters in modern warfare."[142] Reportedly, "heavy helicopter losses among Russian forces in Ukraine led top U.S. Army officials to question the survivability of manned rotorcraft in future conflicts," leading to an emphasis on UAS.[143] One analyst observes that helicopters

> which fly low and relatively slow, are easy targets for missiles and drones. U.S. leaders are watching closely and realizing that in a future war against a strong enemy, their helicopters might not survive long. At the same time, unmanned drones are proving they can perform many of the jobs once handled only by helicopters—scouting, striking targets, and even resupplying troops—without risking pilots.[144]

Both manned and unmanned Army Aviation platforms face a variety of threats, including

- first-person-view (FPV) drones, loitering munitions, and low-cost drone swarms that can be used to intercept and destroy helicopters in midair, particularly vulnerable troop-carrying helicopters;
- ground-based air defense systems, such as man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) as well as a wide variety of ground-based, anti-aircraft guns;

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[138] Todd South, "Army to Cut 6,500 Active-Duty Jobs Over the Next Two Years," *Army Times*, September 19, 2025, https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2025/09/19/army-to-cut-6500-active-duty-aviation-jobs-over-next-2-years/.

[139] South, "Army to Cut 6,500 Active-Duty Jobs Over the Next Two Years."

[140] Eurosatory.com, "U.S. Army Aviation: Towards A New Burden-Sharing Between Manned and Unmanned Assets?," October 1, 2025, https://www.eurosatory.com/en/u-s-army-aviation-towards-a-new-burden-sharing-between-manned-and-unmanned-assets/.

[141] Chris Wingate, "How to Preserve the Army's Lifeline," *The National Interest*, July 16, 2025, https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-to-preserve-the-us-militarys-lifeline.

[142] Mikey Miller, "The Future of Military Helicopters: Insights from IMH 2025," Vislink, accessed February 1, 2026, https://www.vislink.com/blog/the-future-of-military-helicopters-insights-from-imh-2025/#:~:text=The%20Ukraine%2DRussia%20conflict%20has,function%20without%20constant%20operator%20control.

[143] David Roza, "Why Is the Army Chopping Away at Its Chopper Fleet?," *The War Horse*, August 22, 2025, https://www.defensenews.com/news/your-army/2025/08/29/why-is-the-army-chopping-away-at-its-chopper-fleet/.

[144] Paul Mooney, "U.S. Army Reduces Helicopter Fleet to Boost Tiltrotor Investment," MyBaseGuide, https://mybaseguide.com/army-helicopter-fleet, September 15, 2025.

- Electronic Warfare (EW) and GPS jamming that disrupt navigation;
- the proliferation of threat-integrated battlefield sensors that make it more difficult for helicopters to operate undetected; and
- the evolving role of AI and how advances in this field could increase the lethality and effectiveness of some of the aforementioned threats.

Citing the high operational costs of the Army's manned helicopter fleet and the threats described above, Army leadership and some policymakers have expressed concerns about the long-term role of manned helicopters in high-intensity conflicts. Some outside observers caution that the Army should not prematurely divest missions or systems without exploring how to adapt existing platforms to the future operating environment.[145] DOD has drawn on crewed helicopters during the war in Iran to shoot down small boats.[146] On March 19, 2026, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Air Force General Dan Caine said that U.S. allies have used Apache helicopters to shoot down drones in the Middle East.[147]

Congress may or may not examine the impact of evolving threats on Army Aviation to identify threat-informed, risk-mitigation technologies and practices that could be incorporated into future Army Aviation developmental programs and plans.

[145] Hannah Lamb, "Angle of Attack: Apache Attack Helicopters in Unmanned Skies," *Irregular Warfare Initiative*, January 6, 2026, https://irregularwarfare.org/articles/angle-of-attack-apache-attack-helicopters-in-unmanned-skies/.

[146] Schmitt, "U.S. Shot Down Iranian Missiles and Drones."

[147] DOD, "Transcript: Secretary of War Pete Hegseth and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Air Force Gen. Dan Caine Hold a Press Briefing," March 19, 2026, https://www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4438625/secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-and-chairman-of-the-joint-chiefs-air-force-gen-da/.

Appendix A. Army Aircraft Inventory

Table A-1. Army Active Component and Reserve Component Crewed Aircraft Inventory

Aircraft Type	FY2025		FY2026		FY2027 Request	
	Active	Reserve[a]	Active	Reserve[a]	Active	Reserve[a]
Rotorcraft						
AH-64D	120	18	24	24	0	0
AH-64E	408	72	312	72	288	96
CH47F	156	197	172	197	168	156
HH-60M	171	176	160	176	157	195
UH-60L	162	472	0	358	0	284
UH-60M	338	365	431	355	373	360
UH-60V	10	120	20	60	20	60
UH-72A/B	474	210	474	210	474	211
Fixed-Wing						
EO-5	3	0	0	0	0	0
RO-6	0	0	0	0	0	0
C-12	103	69	103	67	103	67
C-26	11	10	11	10	11	10
C-37	3	0	3	0	3	0
RC-12	6	0	0	0	0	0
MC-12	6	0	7	0	0	0
UC-35	28	0	28	0	28	0
UC-35A	0	16	0	14	0	14
ME-11B	0	0	0	0	2	0

Aircraft Type	FY2025		FY2026		FY2027 Request	
	Active	Reserve[a]	Active	Reserve[a]	Active	Reserve[a]
COCO aircraft	9	0	11	0	6	0

Source: CRS analysis of U.S. Army, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army, Volume 1*, April 2026, pp. 133, 136; U.S. Army, *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army Reserve, Volume 1*, April 2026, pp. 91-92; and U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Budget Estimates, Operation and Maintenance, Army National Guard, Volume 1*, April 2026, pp. 103, 105. (DOD is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.)

Notes: "COCO" stands for contractor-owned/contractor-operated.

a. "Reserve" refers to the Reserve Component—the U.S. Army Reserve and the U.S. Army National Guard.

Appendix B. FY2027 Funding Authorizations and Appropriations for Army Aircraft

Table B-1. FY2027 Funding Authorizations and Appropriations for Selected Army Aircraft

in billions of dollars of budget authority and quantities, if available

System Type and Name (relevant CRS product, if available)	FY2027 DOD Request				Authorization						Appropriation					
	Mandatory[a]		Discretionary[a]		House		SASC		Enacted		HAC		SAC		Enacted	
	$	#	$	#	$	#	$	#	$	#	$	#	$	#	$	#
Rotorcraft																
Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft (IF12771)			$2.27		$2.27		$2.27				$2.14					
CH-47 Chinook			$0.33	5	$0.71	12	$0.33	5			$0.77					
AH-64 Apache			$0.28		$0.28		$0.31				$0.28					
UH-60 Black Hawk			$0.07	1	$0.32	7	$0.07	1			$0.69					
Uncrewed Aircraft																
MQ-1C Gray Eagle			$0.06		$0.06		$0.06				$0.30					

Source: CRS analysis of U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), *Program Acquisition Cost by Weapon System*, April 2026; FY2026 *Procurement Programs (P-1)* and *Research, Development, Test & Evaluation Programs (R-1)* spreadsheets; FY2027 military department budget justification books; H.R. 8800; S. 4784; H.R. 9495 and H.Rept. 119-715. (DOD is "using a secondary Department of War designation" under Executive Order 14347 dated September 5, 2025.)

Notes: Figures rounded to the nearest hundredth. Figures include funding for aircraft spares and repair parts. H.Rept. 119-715 did not include funding quantities.

a. CRS analysis of the columns titled "FY 2027 Mandatory Request" and "FY 2027 Discretionary Request" in FY2027 DOD budget documents; FY2027 *Procurement Programs (P-1)* and *Research, Development, Test & Evaluation Programs (R-1)*; and FY2027 military department budget justification books.

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