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Understanding Why a Ground Combat Vehicle That Carries Nine Dismounts Is Important to the Army

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Summary

BLUF: The GCV is an Acquisition Program, but It's Really About Enabling Infantry Operations

- Since absorbing the lessons of WW II and Korea, U.S. Infantry doctrine has emphasized fire and maneuver at the squad level
 - Fire and maneuver capability requires squads of 9 or more soldiers
- Future infantry operations will likely include more actions against technically enabled adversaries in complex terrain, requiring:
 - Protected and lethal mobility for the dismount squad elements, and;
 - An ability for the squad to conduct independent fire and maneuver immediately upon dismounting
- None of this is new:
 - The Army has been trying (for 50 years) to develop a survivable, lethal infantry fighting vehicle (IFV) that carries a 9-soldier squad
 - The Bradley IFV compromised squad size for vehicular lethality and cost savings
- GCV is about developing the IFV that enables both mounted and dismounted operations

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Since the Army first started experimenting with mechanization¹ for its infantry units before World War II, it has endeavored to find the right mix of doctrine, organizations, and equipment to enable the most effective mounted and dismounted units. One lesson that has been consistent in practice and—as theorized in every Army schoolhouse—is that the most basic infantry unit capability is the capacity to maneuver dismounted while covered by suppressive fire. This tactic is fundamental at all echelons and defines the basic capability of the dismounted infantry squad. Partly because the Army's current infantry fighting vehicle, the M2 Bradley, cannot carry enough soldiers to enable squad-level fire and maneuver from a single vehicle, the Army has pursued development of the Ground Combat Vehicle (GCV).

At least some future Army operations are likely to occur in complex terrain that reduces the advantage that advanced sensors and long-range, precision munitions provide to U.S. military forces. These kinds of operational environments will require U.S. infantry forces to be equipped with protected and lethal mobility that allows closing with and engaging the enemy. Moreover, since mounted maneuver is often insufficient to defeat the enemy in complex terrain, infantry squads will require the capability to dismount and fight on foot. But dismounting in complex terrain will often occur under fire, when visibility and supporting fires between vehicles are more

¹ In this report, *mechanization* (or mechanized infantry) refers to the use of armored vehicles with off-road capability by infantry for both transportation and mounted combat. *Motorization* refers to the use of trucks or other unarmored vehicles to move infantry rapidly to where it is needed.

restricted and when communications between vehicles is difficult. Thus, unless squads are carried together in a single vehicle, they are more likely to be disadvantaged upon dismounting, particularly in unplanned situations—for example, when unexpectedly coming under fire or when attacked by an IED. If each squad is provided with a vehicle that can carry it, then the entire squad will be able to fire and maneuver much more rapidly upon exit from the vehicle.

The Army's statement of this requirement is not new. For over 50 years, it has tried to develop and field survivable, lethal IFVs that are capable of carrying a full infantry squad (numbering between nine and eleven men). That has been a challenge, and the Army's investment in the Bradley IFV compromised the capability to maintain a dismounted squad's fire-and-maneuver capability in favor of cost efficiency and the lethality provided by the TOW missile system.

The GCV is the Army's current attempt to address an issue it has identified for last six decades. If developed as planned, the GCV will provide the infantry with the IFV it has been trying to develop since the 1960s and, moreover, provide one that can grow and adapt to accommodate future requirements.