

Army spells out long-term plan for equipping force after drawdowns

U.S. Army

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, July 1, 2013) -- One of the tasks now facing the Army is getting "the right equipment, to the right units, on the right installations, at the absolute least possible cost," wrote the Army's vice chief of staff.

Gen. John F. Campbell signed off, June 20, on a "roadmap" for accomplishing just that. The new guidance is called the "Army Equipping Guidance 2013 through 2016."

The challenge, Campbell said, is that "we are experiencing turbulent times as we work through major force structure and stationing changes, with potentially more to follow, while deploying and redeploying units into combat."

Other challenges, he said, include the furlough of the civilian workforce, less money due to sequestration, and the un-forecasted budgetary requirements of overseas contingency operations.

IN THE WRONG PLACES

The Army has a lot of equipment -- so much so that it's at an all-time high of having roughly 90 percent of what it needs, said Brig. Gen. John G. Ferrari, director, joint and futures, Army G-8. By comparison, in 2001 the Army had about 80 percent of the equipment it needed across the components.

"The challenge today is that there is equipment in the wrong places," Ferrari said.

As the Army draws down from Afghanistan, brigade combat teams are restructured, and the Army re-postures for regional alignments, equipment that is spread across Afghanistan will need to be redistributed, Ferrari said.

Until now, the war was the main equipment driver.

Prior to 9/11, each unit owned its own gear, Ferrari said. Then, when the war started, all that equipment was collected and pooled. Units preparing for deployment were loaned equipment to use while at Army training centers.

During the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan, units got their equipment based on their deployment schedule, Ferrari said. They received some equipment after arriving in theater and then left it there for the next units rotating in.

Now, most units are no longer deploying to theater. Yet their equipment is still there, in Afghanistan, set up for large-scale rotations.

So, although equipment is at an all-time high, "when you look at individual units, they'll say, 'we don't have our equipment,' or 'we don't have the right equipment,'" Ferrari said.

THREE LINES OF EFFORT

Campbell's guidance provides direction for Army components, commands, and units on how to allocate and distribute equipment.

The underlying foundation of the Army's plan is to identify and minimize equipment risks and costs as it transitions "from Afghanistan, through sequestration, towards regionally aligned and mission-tailored forces."

The guidance lays out three lines of effort: equipping units for their missions; increasing readiness by redistributing equipment; and saving money. It also identifies a multitude of tasks, missions, and challenges; each of which must be tackled at the lowest possible levels of command and at the least possible cost.

SHIPPING CHARGES

With the effects of sequestration now being felt across the Army, cost is a very important factor in redistributing equipment. Just moving one tank from Fort Riley, Kan., to Fort Bliss, Texas, is costly, Ferrari said -- even in good times.

But with budgets now tight, he said, the cost of moving equipment around has to be balanced with mission priorities -- not to mention other fiscal requirements for personnel, readiness and modernization.

While moving a tank from Riley to Bliss is costly, the cost to retrograde a mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicle, or MRAP, from Afghanistan to the U.S. is much greater, he said.

In many cases, it's simply too costly to bring such equipment back home. Instead, it's less expensive to simply destroy that equipment in theater and then leave it there as scrap. Money is instead spent to retrograde more-needed equipment.

Once an MRAP or other gear is deemed too expensive to ship, "the law says 'where is, as is,'" Ferrari said. That means that other nations that want the equipment can have it, but they've got to move it from Afghanistan and take it in the condition it's in.

There have been a number of inquiries from allies and coalition partners about excess inventory, Ferrari said. But once those allies figured how much it would cost to bring it out of Afghanistan and fix it up, they came to the same conclusion -- it is not worth the cost.

As for the Afghans, Ferrari said they have their own equipment fleets. And an MRAP might not be a worthwhile addition for them, since they don't have the spare parts

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and maintenance set up for that vehicle. He also said the Afghan mission requirements might not require an MRAP.

"We don't want to leave Afghanistan like the Soviets did, with equipment strewn across the battlefield," he said.

Equipment being moved out of Afghanistan now must first be "reset" back in the United States. That means it first goes to a depot to be overhauled or repaired before sending it to a receiving unit. There is a big price tag for that kind of repair, Ferrari said.

"We have to be very efficient and judicious as we move equipment around units, installations and Army components," he said.

CALLING THE SHOTS

Army Materiel Command, known as AMC, has been tasked with managing equipment distribution and redistribution. This is a big change, and a welcome one too, Ferrari said.

Prior to AMC's role, equipping decisions were made from the Pentagon in a centralized, top-down fashion. Now with AMC being the lead materiel integrator, it's a bottom-up approach based on using the commander's intent for guidance, he said.

AMC uses the Lead Materiel Integrator Decision Support Tool containing equipment data from the field to inform its distribution and redistribution recommendations, Ferrari said.

Weightings or priorities are assigned to units and gear in determining what goes where. The model is dynamic, as new missions emerge. But for the most part, AMC attempts to anticipate what will be needed where and when.

Ferrari thinks it may take five or six years to sort out all the equipment needs.

With AMC taking the lead, Ferrari said he's confident the Army is now on the right track with equipping the force.

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