

Industrial base essential to overcome future threats

U.S. Army

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, July 25, 2014) -- Lt. Gen. Michael E. Williamson, principal military deputy to the assistant secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology, said that after three months in his position, one of the things he's learned is how the industrial base is interwoven with risk.

Speaking before a packed house of Association of the U.S. Army members, at the organization's Institute of Land Warfare breakfast, Thursday, Williamson said he wasn't going to make remarks about specific equipment programs. Instead he wanted to talk about what kept him up at night.

Williamson said he is concerned that experts will not be available to help the Army adapt quickly to the next threat, if both the organic and commercial industrial base are not sustained.

"What keeps me up at night is making sure we have the human capital -- the program managers, the engineers, the contracting professionals who are experienced and who understand how to do these things very quickly, very efficiently and very effectively, and that we have the relationship with our industry partners so they understand not only those things that we're building today, but those things that are on the horizon," Williamson said.

Turning to one of his only comments with regard to equipment, Williamson recalled his early years in the Army when he drove around in a lightweight Jeep that was replaced by the safer, more mobile and rugged Humvee. Then when the enemy began using improvised explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army realized the Humvee's vulnerabilities and developed the up-armored Humvee.

"Essentially that was applying armor while our design engineers, our industrial base was in the process of figuring out how to upgrade the transmission and how to build an integrated system to provide more protection," he said. "While doing that we went out and looked at commercial sources and eventually started producing MRAPs (mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles)."

He added that the Army, the Marine Corps and Special Operations Command were on track to build the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle, or JLTV, which will provide even more increased protection and mobility for Soldiers.

While he is concerned that the Army makes sure it has wherewithal to deliver capability to warfighters 10 years down the road, he reminded the audience that the enemy "does have a vote," and there will be new threats and new requirements that come, so it's paramount the country has sustained investment in order to have

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the manufacturing capability in the U.S.

"Because at the end of the day, what I do is manage risk, and that risk comes down to making sure our Soldiers always have overmatch capability, and that's more than just providing equipment," he explained. "It's about making sure we don't use all of the nation's wealth, all of the funding that's provided to the U.S. Army for equipment, but that we have enough that's available to provide for training and sustaining."

"If you look at the commercial sector, the sustained investment in communications equipment is what gives you the ability to always be connected," Williamson said. "Cell phones didn't magically appear. There was a constant investment in both infrastructure and the technology that allows us to have what we have at the price point we have today. But, the real issue to me is, how do we as an Army; how do we as a department; and how do we as a nation, make sure we identify those capabilities, those national assets that we have to have in place so that our Soldiers can always go into a fight with the best capabilities available so that they never fight a fair fight."

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