



Equipment for the Soldier: A Most Critical Unfunded Requirement

Introduction

The Good News: The Army is committed to correcting the long-overdue modernization of individual and small unit equipment for active and reserve component Soldiers.

The “Not So” Good News: Among the \$5.987 billion worth of Army unfunded requirements, there is a budget shortfall of \$1.175 billion for this endeavor.

Background

Other Army priorities and prolonged fielding schedules have caused shortages and obsolescence of Soldier equipment. During Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the Army found Soldiers using their personal funds to buy more suitable commercial items to enhance mission performance. The Army responded by establishing a Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI) to provide Soldiers with the finest state-of-the-art equipment. Starting with two divisions—the 82d Airborne and the 101st Airborne (Air Assault)—unit commanders developed a list of much-needed items, and Army leadership directed the Program Executive Office (PEO) Soldier to acquire and field the items. The list has since expanded and more than 70,000 Soldiers supporting OEF and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have received new equipment, dramatically improving their lethality, mobility and survivability on the battlefield.

What is RFI?

RFI is a kit of approximately 50 essential items that provide the most up-to-date equipment to Soldiers at war. The items range from mission-essential equipment, such as improved boots, socks and “wick-away” t-shirts, to key force protection items, such as the advanced combat helmet and knee and elbow pads, among others. Also included are critical lethality items—for example, improved ammunition packs, team radios, and advanced weapon optics.

The Next Step

The criticality of RFI to Soldier readiness and its impact on their capabilities and well-being have fostered further expansion of the program. The Army will now equip all 840,000 Soldiers in the operational Army with RFI equipment by the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2007. This will include 48 active and 36 reserve component brigade combat teams (BCTs), along with their associated combat support units. Unfortunately, this plan has an FY 2005 unfunded requirement of \$1.175 billion. Congress is currently considering the details of the FY 2005 President’s Budget. It is imperative that equipment for Soldiers—a most critical unfunded requirement—receive highest priority now and for the foreseeable future as Soldiers go in harm’s way in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

Key Points

- Among \$5.987 billion worth of Army unfunded requirements for FY 2005, there is a shortfall of \$1.175 billion for individual and small unit equipment.
- The Army established a Rapid Fielding Initiative (RFI) to ensure deployed Soldiers have the most current equipment available. RFI is a kit of approximately 50 items in the categories of force protection and mobility, lethality, soldier mission-essential equipment and individual weapons optics.
- The program is expanding to encompass more than 840,000 Soldiers. The commitment to ensure Soldiers are fully equipped created a \$1.175 billion unfunded requirement for FY 2005 that must be funded now.



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