



Rapid Equipping Force: Innovative Materiel Solutions to Operational Requirements

The 20th century Cold War-era force required an economy-of-scale approach to equipping. That approach fielded equipment capable of operating in every climatic and terrain condition. It assumed that units would deploy, conduct operations under the control of combatant commanders, complete operations and then redeploy to garrisons. The political and military realities supporting that approach have changed radically. Today, a much greater percentage of a smaller force is under the direct control of combatant commanders.



Why Rapid Equipping?

Conflicts invariably produce altered and emerging requirements from operational commanders. The rapidly changing demands and increasing complexity and dilemmas of the 21st century battlespace require speedy and useful materiel solutions to enhance war-winning mission capabilities and to reduce risk to the soldier. The Army needs an established means to assess emerging requirements for materiel solutions, to quickly identify those solutions to the emerging operational requirements of combatant commanders, and to suggest solutions that can be implemented in an operationally useful time frame. Beyond that need, solutions must be evaluated for their possible contribution as way-stations to the future force.



What is the Rapid Equipping Force?

Reporting to the Vice Chief of Staff, Army (VCSA), the Rapid Equipping Force (REF) works directly with operational commanders to find promising materiel solutions to their identified operational requirements. Selected solutions may be off the shelf (either government or commercial) or near-term developmental items that can be available quickly. Based on the success of those efforts, the Army senior leadership has directed that the REF be expanded and institutionalized as an independent activity taking operational guidance from the G3 and reporting directly to the VCSA. The REF will continue rapidly inserting new technology solutions that address the current battlefield issues of engaged and deploying forces. It will also begin to develop, experiment with and evaluate key technologies and systems for achieving future force capabilities under operational conditions.



Rapid Equipping Force (continued)



24-Hour Response Time

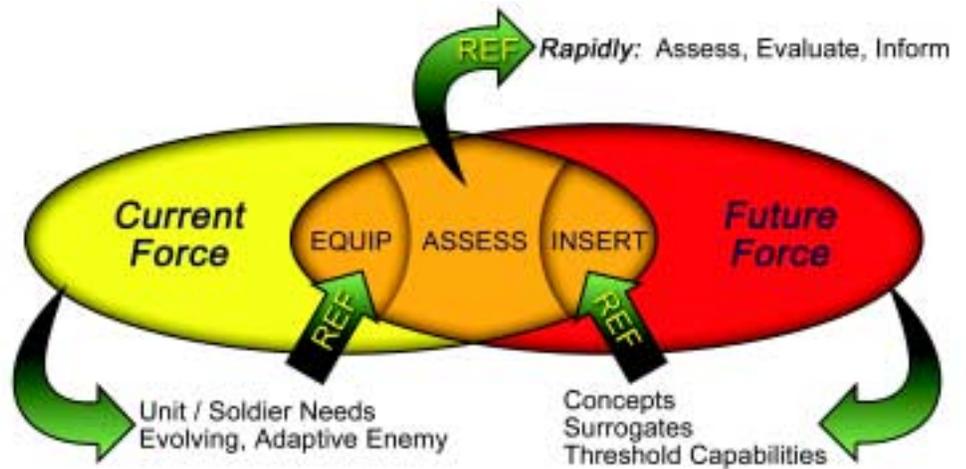
The REF concept of operations includes frequent in-theater canvassing of soldier requirements in an operational environment. Time on the ground in-theater is an essential



aspect of REF operations. Over a 24-hour period a REF representative in Afghanistan learned of a mission need, created a technical solution, and went on an Army infantry company combat mission for three days. The REF learned that soldiers on patrol either were endangering themselves by dropping into wells to look for weapons caches or were simply dropping in a chemlight to check depth and then moving on if nothing was visible. The REF quickly jury-rigged a web-camera attached to Ethernet cable and a laptop. On its first mission, this capability—dubbed Well-Cam—found a weapons and equipment cache inside a 70–80-foot well. The engineers and the infantry company commander stated that without the Well-Cam, the cache would not have been found. Providing materiel solutions can't always happen in 24 hours. But the REF's presence at forward operating bases in Afghanistan and Iraq helps focus and accelerate the process that produces materiel solutions.

Not the Normal Model

The normal model for providing materiel solutions involves letting a contract and managing a contractor's performance. The REF embodies a new model that changes the focus and requires being personally involved in responding to the warfighting commander; working with soldiers; observing/participating in operations; and modifying systems on the spot as required.



During Operation Iraqi Freedom the REF was able to bring an important capability to counter remote-controlled improvised explosive devices to the forces in Northern Iraq within three days from receipt of the warning order.



Earlier, the REF brought the same capability to Kuwait within nine days of confirming that the assets were available in inventory. The REF delivered operational robots, known as PackBots, to Afghanistan within 27 days of project approval in the summer of 2002. The PackBots helped clear 34 caves, buildings and compounds in their first four combat patrols.

As a result of 11 September 2001, the "strategic pause" has ended. The Army must heavily invest in and rapidly equip its Current Force.

