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Chief sees '2 tough years ahead' in putting army in balance. "We still have two tough years ahead" in putting the Army back in balance, the chief of staff told almost 400 attendees at the January Institute of Land Warfare breakfast in suburban Washington.

Gen. George W. Casey Jr. described balance as meeting the Army's end strength goals and meeting its targeted growth of the active force by 2010. "We have to increase the time soldiers spend at home," he said in his Jan. 14 address. "One to one [one year deployed and one year back home] was OK at the start," but repeated deployments are taking a toll.

In addition, more time at home allows for more training in areas other than counterinsurgency warfare. Casey said with two years at home soldiers and units could spend a rotation at a combat training center and also conduct a mission rehearsal exercise. It also would give the Army time to equip the unit. "We are going to complete modular organization" in seven years. Casey called that "a large accomplishment."

Also by 2011, "we will complete our re-stationing" under base realignment and closure and returning soldiers, their families and civilians from Europe and Korea. Casey said those moves will affect about 380,000 soldiers, family members and Department of the Army civilians.

Over the same time, the Army will have implemented its force generation model. The model calls for the active force to be available for a year-long deployment and then spend two years at home. For the reserve components, they would be available for a year-long deployment and would then spend four or five years at home. "We are just coming to grips with an Army that operates on this model. It affects recruiting, training."

"We have to get our force [trained and ready] for full spectrum operations." For the future, Casey sees the Army as a service that is versatile, expeditionary, agile, lethal, sustainable and interoperable in an era of persistent conflict.

Welcome to new Washington Update. This is the first issue of the Washington Update to be found solely on the AUSA Web site. We intend to keep the news as fresh as we can and post it early in the month for your information and use. Comments may be sent to John Grady, director of communications, at jgrady.ousa.org

Army announces stand down in effort to prevent suicides. Army Secretary Pete Geren said that if the Army was going to succeed in reducing the number of suicides in the service it was going to have reach down to all in its ranks and partner with the Veterans Administration, the National Institute of Mental Health and other agencies in addressing the issue that claimed at least 128 soldiers' lives last year.

"Is there a silver bullet out there? I'm confident there isn't," he said. Geren pledged to allocate the resources "human and financial" to bolster suicide prevention efforts in the Army and set a model for the nation.

The Army suicide rate in 2008 was 20.2 percent per 100,000; and for the first time in almost three decades surpassed the civilian suicide rate among individuals of the same ages and backgrounds. The civilian rate was 19.5 per 100,000 in 2006, the last year data was available. Fifteen additional Army deaths are still under review by the Armed Forces Medical Investigator.

"There is no doubt in my mind that stress is a factor," Gen. Peter Chiarelli, Army vice chief of staff and the leader of the service's suicide prevention effort, said at a Jan. 29 meeting with reporters. About 30 percent of the Army suicides were among soldiers deployed overseas. Seventy-eight percent of the suicides were among soldiers on their first deployment. More than half of the Army suicides on home station occurred within a year after deployment.

In announcing a stand-down for every unit between Feb. 15 and March 15 and follow-up chain teaching, Chiarelli said, "This is not business as usual. We need to move quickly to do everything we can to reverse the very disturbing number of suicides we have in the U.S. Army."

Adding, "We are pre-positioning materials that will be available for their use in conducting that stand-down with their soldiers, and in addition to that, we will follow up that period with a chain-teach that is designed to get out to every single soldier and down the chain of command, and that will be conducted in a 120-day period after 15 March. We'll ask commanders to complete that chain teach. But a review of what we've done before is absolutely crucial. The second thing that is absolutely crucial is that we reach out to soldiers and tell them that it is not wrong to ask for help. We have to change our culture."

Army adopts new strategy to address sexual harassment, assault. The Army unveiled a new campaign and strategy involving education, investigation and prosecution to address sexual harassment and sexual assault in the ranks.

Echoing his address at the opening ceremony at the Association of the United States Army's Annual Meeting and Exposition, Army Secretary Pete Geren said the 1,800 convictions for sexual assault since 9/11 are "a crime against core values" and "a crime that destroys unit cohesion."

He added in a Jan. 26 meeting with reporters: "There are no bystanders" in preventing sexual harassment and assault and soldiers have a "primary goal and the moral duty to take care of his or her battle buddy."

Lt. Gen. Michael Rochelle, Army G-1, said prevention "starts with the conviction" that these crimes are "against core Army values." Adding, "A critical element of the strategy is ... to eliminate attitudes and perceptions" that foster harassment among all those entering the Army.

"Sexual assault is the most underreported crime in the world," Rochelle noted. He also said as the campaign and strategy take off, he expects an increase in reports as more soldiers put their trust in the system. "We view this as a positive trend."

Carolyn Collins, who works on sexual harassment and assault issues for the G-1, said, "We saw a sharp increase in reporting" in 2004 when the Army began emphasizing prosecuting these cases and launched pilot programs in prevention at Fort Hood, Texas, and Fort Lewis, Wash.

Geren said the Army will be spending \$44 million on the campaign and strategy. This does not include funds being spent in these areas by the Installation Management Command.

Among the initiatives is the "I.[intervene] A.[act] M.[motivate] Strong Command program that includes training and workshops. Other parts of the campaign involve interactive web sessions for soldiers and a commander's resource Web site.

Lt. Gen. Scott Black, the judge advocate general, said 15 Army lawyers are being trained as experts in sexual assault cases and they will be assigned to the Army's largest installations as prosecutors.

In addition, these lawyers will be expected to train other Army prosecutors and defense attorneys in handling sexual assault cases.

"These really are historic steps." Adding, "These are nuanced cases, usually one on one" and can prove "very, very difficult to try."

Budget issues are on front burner. As a new administration takes office, a senior Army officer sees soldier and family programs, base realignment and closure, the moving away from supplemental appropriations and restructuring of the Future Combat Systems program as major budgetary issues that will be played out over the next five years.

Speaking Jan. 9 at an Association of the United States Army symposium in suburban Washington, Lt. Gen. Stephen Speakes, G-8, said, "We're seeing positive results" in moving additional funds in the past two years to soldier and family programs in terms of retention and recruiting. We had to make investments there."

On BRAC and military construction, "two-thirds of the Army will be affected" by these moves. The realignment and closures to be completed in September 2011 also will "totally reshape TRADOC (Army Training and Doctrine Command) into centers of excellence."

Speakes said the Army already has been moving funds for a number of programs now covered under emergency spending bills into the base budget, but this will likely accelerate in the future under congressional scrutiny.

He added that there is an "emerging realization" of the value of the networks going into FCS in the Defense Department and on Capitol Hill, and a move to push more of these capabilities into the field as quickly as possible.

But Army "modernization is bigger than FCS. We need to upgrade" existing systems and platforms and "rapidly spin out capabilities" to soldiers, Speakes said.

Lt. Gen. N. Ross Thompson, director of the Army Acquisition Corps, asked rhetorically: "Why wouldn't you field [new capabilities] ... to influence the warfight today?"

Adding, "We're making sure [the FCS spin outs] work together before we put them in the hands of soldiers."

"You can't take 20 years to bring capabilities to the field," Speakes said.

Looking back at the decision to cancel the Comanche Reconnaissance Armed Helicopter in February 2004, Speakes said it allows the Army to invest in 4,000 aircraft and provide better force protection rather than adding the 350 RAH-66s that were to be in the fleet.

He said fielding a new armed reconnaissance helicopter "has our undivided attention," and to keep modernizing as needed the existing OH-58 Kiowa Warriors.

Gates predicts ‘long slog’ in Afghanistan.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates told members of the House and Senate Armed Services Committee that even with an additional 12,000 more American troops in Afghanistan by the end of the summer and increased support from NATO countries, the conflict there will be a “long slog.”

Testifying Jan. 27, he said, “Frankly my view is that we need to be very careful about the nature of the goals we set for ourselves in Afghanistan.”

Adding, “If we set ourselves the objective of creating some sort of central Asian Valhalla over there, we will lose, because nobody has that kind of time, patience or money.”

Gates said goals also should be very near term in Afghanistan. “My own personal view is that our primary goal is to prevent Afghanistan from being used as a base for terrorists and extremists to attack the United States and our allies, and whatever we need to do flows from that objective.”

Afghanistan has become the nation’s “top overseas military priority.” Gates also said, “The ideology we face was incubated there when Afghanistan became a failed state and the extremists have largely returned their attention to that region in the wake of reversals in Iraq.”

Similarly at a meeting with foreign reporters, Adm. Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said events in Afghanistan “haven’t been going well for a significant period of time.”

At the Senate hearing, the secretary said the United States was also concerned about areas of neighboring Pakistan being used as havens for the Taliban and al Qaeda and aerial strikes against targets there would likely continue.

“Let me just say both President Bush and President Obama have made clear that we will go after al Qaeda wherever al Qaeda is and we will continue to pursue them,” he said.

Gates said the security situation in Afghanistan “increasingly has been filled by the Taliban.” He said that adding more American combat and support troops was not the answer. But better Afghan soldiers and police were.

In addition, he said Afghanistan does not have the infrastructure, including enough medical evacuation helicopters and field hospitals to treat wounded or injured soldiers in place to accommodate a greater increase in American or NATO forces.

Gates has ordered a fourth field hospital be built and the services dedicate more helicopters for medical evacuation with some of them assigned to forward operating bases.

Afghanistan presents challenges for Army aviation.

The contrast between Iraq and Afghanistan for Army aviators is dramatic and stark, four combat commanders told 300 attendees at an Association of the United States Army’s symposium and exposition in suburban Washington Jan. 8.

Col. James Richardson, commander of the 101st Combat Aviation Brigade, said, “There’s not much support up front in Afghanistan. You have to realize you might go down.”

Adding, “You have to fly your [spare] parts” to where the helicopters are staged. “You need additional tools” because of the conditions and distances—and commanders need “many low-density personnel” to keep the aircraft flying.

Lt. Col. (P) Van J. Voorhees, commander, 1st Battalion 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, said, “There was incredible teamwork” with contractors. “We relied heavily on in-country brigades for parts.”

In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the commanders said contractor support was excellent, and they became mentors for young soldiers in how to maintain the aircraft under Spartan conditions.

“They were the teachers for our young soldiers,” Richardson said.

“My biggest concern was the weather,” Col. Chandler Sherrell, commander, Task Force 49, said about Afghanistan. “You never knew what was up ahead. And, of course, small arms,” including heavy machine guns and rocket propelled grenades fired from the ground, were also concerns.

Richardson asked for industry’s help in overcoming the dangers of brown-out landings. He called that “my biggest threat.”

In both theaters, fires coordination was effective. “It’s all about supporting the guy on the ground,” Richardson said. That means constant training with the Air Force and with infantry commanders. “Train, train, train. Keep it simple,” he emphasized.

“There are many different assets there ... gunships, UAVs, aircraft, ground fire coordination” of artillery, Voorhees said. “We’re not going to fight separately.”

Even as the role of unmanned aerial systems expands, “you need to put human eyes on the target,” Sherrell said.

“I can’t say enough about the situational awareness” UAVs gave commanders in the air and on the ground, Richardson said. This was especially true of the Warrior UAV feeds into Block 3 Apache gunships.

Army aviation in demand throughout the world. While troop reductions in Iraq appear to be imminent, the Army's aviation branch chief said that won't have much of an effect on the demand for Army aviation.

Speaking in the opening session of the Association of the United States Army's Aviation Symposium and Exposition on Jan. 8 in Arlington, Va., Maj. Gen. James O. Barclay III said Army aviation doesn't really have a set rotation schedule and continues to get many requests throughout the world.

"Our world is always in flux and changing," Barclay said. Even as troops drawdown in Iraq, the requirement for Army aviation goes up to move them across the battlespace, he said.

Since becoming commander of the U.S. Army Aviation Warfighting Center and Fort Rucker, Ala., in July, Barclay said he has continued to develop the aviation side of the Army Force Generation Model. He said the aviation plan can't be "Rucker centric" as they get feedback from the field and "get the next unit in the barrel" and ready to deploy.

Barclay said it's a team approach to meet the demands of the country and the rest of the Army, from the G1 and G3 to U.S. Army Human Resources Command, Forces Command and Training and Doctrine Command.

Training, equipping, manning and repair issues are discussed every week.

The Army Flight School XXI program, that trains new aviators, has also been drastically revamped to meet demands for Army aviation, Barclay said. Gone are the days where aviators still needed a year to get up to speed at their new unit. Now they can go directly to their new unit and are immediately ready to deploy.

He noted that a group of 26 Apache pilots were recently in theater just 90 days after graduating from flight school, and successes like that come from listening to feedback from field commanders and adjusting the program of instruction to ensure aviators are ready for combat.

The latest Army aircraft platforms have also been performing well in theater or, in the case of the Joint Cargo Aircraft and Sky Warrior unmanned aerial vehicle, are on schedule, Barclay said.

Talks still continue on a new armed reconnaissance helicopter, and the Army should have a better direction of where that path leads sometime this spring.

Aviation reset buys years into aircraft life. The Army's aggressive maintenance reset schedule for aircraft flying in combat zones is helping identify and repair problems that otherwise wouldn't have been discovered, according to Army aviation leaders.

During a panel discussion on Jan. 8 at the Association of the United States Army's Aviation Symposium and Exposition, Col. Al Evans, project manager for the aviation reset program office, read off a list of aircraft that recently went through reset, and more than 90 percent of each platform needed depot-level repair.

With aircraft seeing four to six times normal use because of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, the reset schedule is "buying years into the life of aircraft."

Resetting involves 100 percent disassembling and reassembling aircraft and also allows maintainers to equip aircraft with the latest modifications, said Maj. Gen. James R. Myles, commander of the U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command.

There are eight sites in the world that handle reset of the various aircraft with six in the continental U.S., and while "it would be nice to have a super site" dedicated to handle each airframe, the diversity of the existing sites is more effective.

As the maintenance program continues, there has been a reduction in reset time as well, Evans said. This is also despite no one rotation is the same for each aircraft—every one has had different requirements.

"We're continually looking at ourselves for better ways to execute the mission," he said.

Myles said it's important to identify the successes of resetting Army aviation so it continues beyond drawdown. There will still be a two-year period beyond that to reset the force.

Myles also said condition based maintenance (CBM) is also impacting aircraft reliability in theater—commanders are seeing a 5 percent improvement in readiness rate.

While that might not seem like a lot, with commanders launching almost all aircraft every night, it ensures they have as many aircraft as possible in the air.

He also noted that CBM—which he likened to an electrocardiogram for aircraft—has saved 43 engines.