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McChrystal: Next 18 months critical in Afghanistan. The Army officer now leading American, NATO and European Union forces in Afghanistan said that progress needed to be made in the next 18 to 24 months to turn around the security situation there once a comprehensive counterinsurgency program is in place.

"I believe [the war] is winnable, but I don't think it is easily winnable," Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal said during his June 2 confirmation hearing for the Afghanistan post and promotion to general before the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"This is not what [the United States and its allies] envisioned four years ago or even two years ago" in Afghanistan. He added that casualties were likely to rise and predicted "stiff fighting ahead."

McChrystal declined to say whether he would ask for more American soldiers and marines.

The administration's strategy now foresees 68,000 Americans assigned to Afghanistan, about double the number serving there now.

"How we operate is important" in succeeding in counterinsurgency warfare. "It may be the critical point. This is a struggle for the support of the Afghan people. Our willingness to operate in ways that minimize casualties or damage even when doing so makes our task more difficult is essential to our credibility."

He pledged to follow international and U.S. laws on the treatment of detainees.

In a letter to the committee, he said, "We must at all times adhere to our obligation to treat detainees humanely. Military necessity, along with humanity, are principles underlying the law of war. Military necessity does not permit us to derogate from these imperatives."

McChrystal said he had been "uncomfortable" with then-approved techniques of interrogation, including sleep deprivation and the use of dogs to intimidate detainees, and altered interrogation techniques beginning in 2003 to conform with the Army field manual.

Army looks to Navy, USMC rotation cycle.

The Army's chief of staff said the service is organizing itself "on a rotational cycle" that is "much like the Navy and the Marine Corps" and this is likely to be a central point of attention during the upcoming Quadrennial Defense Review.

Speaking May 28 to the Atlantic Council in Washington, Gen. George W. Casey Jr. said the shift gives the Army "some forces at a level of readiness that could be committed when you have unexpected contingencies."

He said other reasons for the organizational change is the belief that "we'll have a sustained commitment of forces over the next decade," and the need to keep "on a sustainable tempo" for an all-volunteer force. Now, "We've been deploying for four years or so, one year out, one year back. That's not sustainable for us over the long haul."

There would be four groups of forces each with 70,000 soldiers in engineering, military police, civil affairs, psychological operations, etc., plus an operational headquarters, four tactical headquarters and 14 or 15 brigade combat teams.

Additional BCTs for 3 posts halted.

The secretary of the Army announced June 2 that in accordance with the president's budget, the Army has halted the plan to build three additional brigade combat teams (BCTs) at Fort Bliss, Texas, Fort Carson, Colo., and Fort Stewart, Ga.

This decision will not affect the Army's authorized end strength of 547,400.

"I understand the tough economic impact this decision will have on the communities that have worked so hard to prepare for the arrival of the three brigades," said Secretary of the Army Pete Geren. Adding, "They are great partners with the Army, and we will need their continued support as we work on the growth that is under way at these locations."

The Army will reach its target of 45 BCTs in Fiscal Year 2010 with the activation of the 2nd Brigade, 1st Armored Division at Fort Bliss.

The announcement does not involve the re-stationing of the two heavy BCTs scheduled to return from Europe in FY 2012 and FY 2013.

Logistics challenge: What's the demand factor? Among the largest challenges facing the Army today is predicting "what the demand factor" is going to be in five years, a senior service civilian for resources told attendees at the Association of the United States Army's logistics symposium and exhibition in Richmond.

Speaking June 17, Donald Tison, assistant deputy chief of staff, G-8, said the Army is going "to face restricted budgets," but "we're going to modernize."

In terms of manpower, he said the Army is already feeling the effects of the standing up of three new commands—Northern Command, African Command and Cyber Command.

Lt. Gen. James Pillsbury, deputy commanding general of Army Materiel Command, said that as the new commands stood up and will be standing up, the Army is growing by three brigade combat teams and converting 12 others to modularized units.

"At the brigade level, we're in a churn" even without deploying them into Afghanistan or Iraq, he added.

At the same time, "there has been an increase in the number of non-deployables for training, recovery from injuries or illness or moving between assignments. "They make up about 13 percent of the force," Tison said.

Congress is considering raising the Army's active duty end strength above 547,000. "What's the good number? Is it 2,000, 30,000?" to make up for the manpower shortfall.

"The bottom line is we're trying to increase dwell time," Pillsbury said. Adding, "750,000 soldiers put on this uniform every day" to meet the Army's world-wide commitments. "Thank you, guard and reserve."

He added the effects of base realignment and closure (BRAC) are starting to be felt across the Army with \$4.5 billion in construction scheduled for this year and a like amount in the coming year.

Pillsbury noted that three of the Army's four-star headquarters are affected by BRAC. They are AMC, Forces Command and Training and Doctrine Command.

Tison said there is an insufficient amount of equipment to train on and there are lags in delivering equipment.

Pillsbury said the Army is already looking at what a draw-down of forces in Iraq would mean in terms of what equipment is left behind, what is sent to Kuwait or Afghanistan and what would come back to the United States.

Army, industry partnerships must address readiness, cost issues. Maintaining and enhancing warfighting readiness at affordable cost are challenges the Army and defense industry face on a daily basis attendees at the Association of the United States Army's Logistics Symposium and Exhibition were told.

Richard Gillette, senior vice president for production, delivery and support at General Dynamics Land Systems said the Army Force Generation Model must "provide a planning platform [for industry] for reset, training and readiness" that addresses those challenges.

Speaking in Richmond, Va., June 17, he said the Army and industry need "to reduce institutional resistance" to building sustainment partnerships. "Everybody is embracing partnerships," James O'Neill, vice president for integrated logistics global support at Boeing, said. The partnerships need to be affordable and can last for a year, two years or five.

About public-private partnerships, such as the one at Corpus Christi Army Depot, he added, "These things work," and even bring in more projects requiring more workers in the public sector.

Army unveils FM-40—'Sustainment'—at AUSA symposium. "Sustainment is a little broader" than combat service support, and it is one of the Army's six warfighting functions, the commanding general of the Combined Arms Support Command, said at the unveiling of the Army's latest field manual, FM 4-0.

Maj. Gen. James Chambers said his Fort Lee, Va.-based command intentionally used the Association of the United States Army's Logistics Symposium and Exhibition to debut the work. He cited the unveiling of the operations field manual, FM 3-0, in Fort Lauderdale at another AUSA event as the model he was following.

The manual, titled, "Sustainment: Maintaining Army Readiness and Combat Power," is in synch with the operations manual, he said, and "we were able to get it done in 13 months."

He said the manual drew on the expertise of serving and retired officers, defense industry and academia and was reviewed three times before publication.

Speaking June 17 in Richmond, Chambers said, "This affects everything else and gets at how we support large formations" and "also talks about supporting full-scale operations."

Adding, "4-0 flushes out" how sustainment fits in the larger warfighting picture—in a joint area, sustaining a modular force strategically and tactically.

Moving equipment out of Iraq is huge mission. “Our goal is not to turn Kuwait into a parking lot,” a senior Army logistician said about drawing down equipment in Iraq and shipping it back to the United States.

Speaking June 17 at an Association of the United States Army’s Logistics Symposium and Exhibition in Richmond, Va., Maj. Gen. Vincent Boles, assistant deputy chief of staff, G-4, said the drawdown has already begun as Forward Operating Bases are being closed and U.S. forces are preparing to leave Iraq’s major cities by the end of June.

Describing what happens in those closings, Lt. Col. Darren Werner, commander of the 4th Support Battalion, 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, said it “involved moving over 200 containers of equipment, identifying every piece of equipment in it. It was a huge mission.”

He added the ammunition that was left behind was moved to different places in Iraq. “And we did it in 30 days.”

Lt. Gen. Mitchell Stevenson, deputy chief of staff, G-4, said, “We have a lot of stuff there. Imagine if you haven’t PCS’d in eight years.” Adding, “We got lots of warning” about when U.S. combat forces are to leave, “not like Desert Storm. We’ve got a year plus to plan it.”

Stevenson and Boles said that anything the United States does not need now or is planning to leave for the Iraqis is being moved now.

“You’re not going to start seeing significant drawdowns until March,” Stevenson said. This will allow the American forces to be in place for provincial elections in December and their immediate aftermath. After that, “equipment from three to four brigades [will be moved out] every month through August,” the deadline for U.S. combat forces to leave Iraq.

About 50,000 American soldiers will remain to help train Iraqi national police and the Iraqi army.

At the same time, the Army will have to decide what to do with “white equipment, equipment bought by contractors for use by them,” Jeffrey Parsons, executive director of the Army Contracting Command, said.

“A very large footprint of contractors has been left behind,” Werner said.

As to how the equipment will be returned to the United States, Col. (P) John R. O’Connor, deputy commander of Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command, said sealift will lead the way from ports in Iraq, Turkey and Jordan. “There’s a lot of capacity out there” in the Military Sealift Command and possible charters if needed.

NCO ‘brainstorm’ offers non-technology solution. “An NCO brainstorm came up with a solution to the difficult problems” of moving supplies and equipment around Afghanistan,” the command sergeant major of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command told attendees at an Association of the United States Army’s Logistics Symposium and Exhibition. The solution: “Why not mules? They are pack animals.”

Speaking June 17 at the Richmond, Va., symposium dinner, Command Sgt. Maj. David Bruner said a special forces’ noncommissioned officer pressed the point that “we need to move like the locals.” Adding, “How easy it is to be blinded by technology” and not accept a creative solution that is really a old, but tried one.

“This is one of the reasons 2009 is the Year of the Noncommissioned Officer. They are where the rubber meets the road”

Bruner then offered a series of anecdotes of different ways of solving the problem of what to do with a “dead horse.”

“Sometimes we buy a stronger whip to beat the dead horse” or “appoint a committee to study how to ride the dead horse” or “we’ll blame the dead horse’s family” or “we’ll do a study to see if a contractor could ride the dead horse more cheaply” or “promote the dead horse to a supervisory position.”

NCOs can make a difference in looking for innovative solutions to continuing problems, including using old-fashioned ones, he said.

“There is nothing old-fashioned about loving and serving your country.”

Advice to junior officers: Listen to the First Sergeant. When a young officer attending the captain’s course asked a panel of senior noncommissioned officers what tips would they offer to a second lieutenant reporting in, Sgt. Maj. Patrick Strong, from Army Materiel Command’s business transformation directorate said, “The first thing you can do is listen” to the first sergeant.

He reminded them noncommissioned officers are speaking with the voice of experience against the officer’s recent college education. “Let the two mesh together. ... We don’t do it for the money. We do it because we love our country and we love what we do.”

Adding, if the first sergeant “isn’t doing something illegal, immoral or unethical, support him.”

Command Sgt. Maj. Bernard McPherson, from PEO—Soldier advised new company commanders to “ensure you have a meeting with everyone in your company and one of the first should be with the first sergeant.”

VA Secretary Shinseki: ‘We are fighting for resources.’ “We’ve begun to set priorities and fight, fight for resources to turn the Department of Veteran’s Affairs into a 21st century institution,” the VA secretary told 200 attendees at the Army Historical Foundation’s Annual Members’ Meeting at George Washington’s Mount Vernon estate in Fairfax County, Va.

Gen. Eric Shinseki, USA, Ret., a former Army chief of staff, said the department will be an advocate for veterans and its work force will be retrained to meet that goal.

“We’re going to find a way, if I have to hand-sign the checks myself” to get 200,000 veterans into the college of their choice and receiving their increased educational benefits in August when school opens.

Shinseki also pledged to assist in returning the more than 260,000 Priority 8 veterans into the VA health care system. “I am committed to reducing the backlog of six months to a year before [veterans] receive their disability checks.”

Shinseki said the answer was not adding more workers to process the claims, but putting information technology to work instead. “This is the paperbound part of VA” that needs to be replaced.

Shinseki said he also was committed to using information technology to adjudicate 40-year-old Agent Orange claims from the Vietnam War and 20-year-old claims from Operations Desert Shield/Storm, so future VA secretaries are not weighing claims from current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. He said, “It’s a 40-year process. We’re looking for ways to change this. We’re going to find that better way.”

What the VA is handling now and will be handling in the future is providing services and benefits to a growing number of female veterans, who make up 15 percent of the potential beneficiaries now. “We are, for the most part, a male-structured institution.” He said there was about a 10-year window to make the adjustment.

Shinseki said that it was wrong that “veterans lead the nation in homelessness, mental health problems, depression, substance abuse and suicide.”

Saying, “I am not a clinician,” but, he added that it was important to tackle the homelessness issue first because it encompasses so many other issues. He said he wants to take the homeless rates of veterans to zero.

Shinseki said he took the secretary’s position because: “I wanted to give back to the people I went to war with,” and those who preceded his own service and those serving now.

Warrior Transition Command refines criteria. The Army Warrior Transition Command overseeing the Warrior Transition Units is issuing refined criteria and instructions for assignment to WTUs to allow more Army Reserve and Army National Guard soldiers to recover in their hometowns through community-based WTUs.

Many of the warriors in transition will not only have the benefit of recovering at home, they’ll also be able to use local civilian health care facilities, while remaining under the direct supervision of Army unit leaders and medical case managers.

As part of the Army’s Warrior Care and Transition Program, soldiers whose injuries or illnesses require complex medical care are assigned to WTUs, that provide unit leadership and hands-on care management to soldiers.

The CBWTUs located regionally around the United States have Army cadre and medical case managers on staff comparable to active duty WTUs, but assigned soldiers normally live at home and undergo treatment in their local civilian TRICARE health network.

In the past, reserve component soldiers who were mobilized for active duty deployment and became ill or injured were routinely assigned to the active duty WTU at the mobilization station or Army post where they reported for deployment.

Under the new guidance, commanders of WTUs and Army hospitals who determine soldiers’ eligibility for WTU assignment will have the authority to transfer a wounded, ill or injured reserve-component soldier to the CBWTU or WTU nearest the soldier’s hometown.

The reason for the change came from Secretary of the Army Pete Geren, who has met with hundreds of recovering soldiers in WTUs worldwide and related that one of the chief complaints from Army Reserve and National Guard soldiers was separation from the family during the healing process at an active duty WTU.

“We’ve found that the family component is critical in the successful healing and transition of soldiers,” said the WTC commander, Brig. Gen. Gary Cheek. “This is another refinement of the program that better incorporates that critical aspect.”

According to WTC planners, clinical care requirements will always drive the determination for WTU assignment.

Within the Warrior Care and Transition Program, each soldier undergoes a comprehensive medical evaluation to determine WTU eligibility.