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Chief sees Army ‘breathing a bit easier.’ After nine years of conflict and three years of struggling to put the Army back in balance, while transforming to a modular brigade formation, Gen. George W. Casey on Oct. 26 said the force is “breathing a bit easier,” but must now begin to prepare for “the second decade” of the era of persistent conflict.

Looking ahead, the Army Chief of Staff said the goals were to “maintain the combat edge while we seek to reconstitute the force,” not back to where it was before the 9/11 attacks, but for the future.

Casey gave the annual “state of the Army” address to the Dwight D. Eisenhower luncheon at the Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting and Exposition, after helping present awards to some of the Army’s top performing units and non-commissioned officers.

In what will be his last AUSA appearance as the Army’s top officer, Casey recalled his previous warnings that the Army was “out of balance” with a undersize force strained by too many combat deployments. Helped by the drawdown in Iraq and the growth of the force, the Army is able to ease the dwell-to-deployment ratio, which has been one to one.

“By the end of the year, I believe we will be able to put the Army on a sustainable deployment tempo, with as many units trained and ready to deploy” as are in Iraq and Afghanistan, he said.

The army’s goal is two years at home for a year deployed—a 1:2 ratio—by next year and 1:3 by 2014 for the active force and 1:5 for the Guard and Reserve.

But after using the Reserve Component so heavily in the nine years of conflict that it has become a “tactical reserve,” Casey said, “we do not want to take the guard and the reserve back to a strategic reserve,” in which they would be able to deploy only in a major war.

Casey noted that while the Army has been fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan, it also completed the biggest transformation since World War II, converting from a division-based to brigade formation, and a major relocation in carrying out the 2005 base realignment and closure commission results. That transformation is nearly completed and the final moves of personnel under BRAC are underway, he said.

Marshall Award recipient details change in his perspective, commitment to caring for troops. Former Secretary of the Army Pete Geren quoted Gen. George Catlett Marshall in accepting the Association of the United States Army’s highest award—the George Catlett Marshall Medal—named for the soldier-statesman, “We’re going to take care of the troops, first last and all the time” Oct. 27.

Speaking at the final event of the 2010 AUSA Annual Meeting and Exposition, he termed the three-day program “the closest thing we have to a family reunion” but “our family is dealing daily with the pain of loss.”

Geren said that during his term in office, “soldiers and families were the best company in the world” because they were living in a “cynic-free zone.” He added that in a way life on Army posts seemed to be a living Norman Rockwell painting.

Having served for a decade in Congress and as a member of the House Armed Services Committee, Geren returned to Washington to take a position in the Defense Department, shortly before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. “I saw soldiers run to the scene” of the explosion to assist others. “My perspective began to change” of what military service and sacrifice meant.

When he was named first acting secretary and later confirmed as secretary, Geren said that from his office he could feel the weight of the responsibility and obligation he had to soldiers. His office view was of Arlington and the Tomb of the Unknown.

“How different the history of the country would be, how different the history of the world would be without the American soldier—no monuments, no Capitol, no National Mall,” the view he had while serving in the Defense Department. He said that soldiers—less than 1 percent of the nation’s population—provide the defense and security to allow the United States to remain free.

Nearing the end of his address, Geren recalled the actions of Spec. Ross McGinniss of Knox, Pa., who was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously for his actions Dec. 4, 2006. When a grenade was thrown into the Humvee in which he was serving as gunner on a patrol in Baghdad, McGinniss dropped himself onto the grenade to save the lives of the four other soldiers in the vehicle.

JCS chairman terms Army as ‘center of gravity of our military.’ The Army is the “center of gravity of our military,” but the nation needs to act resolutely to ensure that it can manage the strains that the service has experienced in nine years of combat, said Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaking Oct. 27 at the Sustaining Members Luncheon at the AUSA Annual Meeting.

“This decade of persistent conflict has had an impact that we are just beginning to come to terms with, an impact of untold costs and an undetermined toll,” he said. “And I believe that what we can see today is truly just the tip of the iceberg, with consequences for our military and veteran healthcare system, our national employment rate, and even homelessness.”

While the positive news is that as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan wind down, the amount of time soldiers spend at home will increase, that also means that the negative impacts of the wars on soldiers will be seen in different ways, Mullen said. PTS, or post-traumatic stress, is “this conflict’s signature wound,” he said.

“Unlike combat, where danger was largely on patrol and outside the wire, the greatest challenges returning soldiers now face are much closer to home,” he said. “Family issues, financial problems, PTS, even the threat of suicide will be more likely to confront soldiers off-duty vice on, when they are away from the structure and leadership they have become accustomed to.”

The Army’s leadership must learn to deal with a new type of soldier, Mullen said. “We have created a new generation of soldiers, tested to the extreme, waiting to be tested again. How do we keep their adrenaline pumping? How do we keep them engaged constructively? How do we sustain excellence as they transition away from combat?” he asked.

And senior non-commissioned officers will be the key to this transition, he added. “Ultimately our E-8s and our E-9s, as they have so many times before, will need to lead the way here,” he said.

Mullen said that he is in particular worried about homelessness, as veterans struggle to find jobs to match their skills in a difficult economy. “In the Vietnam generation—my generation—similar challenges contributed to far too many veterans falling through the cracks and recent estimates place our homeless veteran population at above 100,000,” he said.

“And experts tell us that there is a five- to seven-year latency period from discharge to homelessness, so the clock is already ticking for today’s war veterans. We simply can’t afford to lose another generation of veterans to homelessness like we did in the Vietnam era.”

Strategy beginning to create results in Afghanistan. The U.S.-led coalition’s new counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan is beginning to create results and military commanders are confident that it will continue to produce results, said Brig. Gen. John Nicholson, Jr., the director of the Pakistan/Afghanistan Coordination Cell at the Joint Staff.

BG Nicholson said for most of the Afghan campaign, it has been under-resourced as more troops and attention were focused on Iraq. That is not the case anymore, and Gen. David Petraeus counterinsurgency strategy gives reason to expect that the lengthy conflict will soon begin to turn, he said. He spoke Oct. 25 at a special presentation at the Association of the United States Army’s Annual Meeting, entitled “Operation Update—Afghanistan.” The key questions, he said, are: “Why has it taken nine years, and why do we have hope that things are going to progress differently?”

The pieces of the counterinsurgency strategy are only now being put into place, including the development of the right institutions for a counterinsurgency campaign, finding the appropriate leaders for those institutions and building up manpower, both military and civilian. The two-part “surge” that has brought an additional 30,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan is key in that effort, he said.

The strategy that Petraeus is implementing is based on the idea that increased security will allow space for better governance and confidence of the Afghan people in the government of President Hamid Karzai. While counterinsurgency strategy is traditionally considered to be a “population-centric” theory, some part of the force is dedicated to attacking enemy forces.

That part of the fight is primarily carried out by special operations forces, which BG Nicholson said are working at an “unprecedented” tempo in Afghanistan. Every 24 hours, on average, U.S.-led forces kill or capture three to five midlevel leaders and 24 fighters. This has created a leadership vacuum among many parts of the Taliban, and anecdotal evidence suggests that morale is sagging, Nicholson said.

The increased number of coalition troops in Afghanistan has created a spike in violence that is “inevitable,” but that will decline over time as it did in Iraq, he said.

In general, improved security leads in time to better governance, which in turn leads to confidence among the population. There are indications that that is what has happened in Nawa, a district in the difficult southern province of Helmand, which in July 2009 became the first area to experience the new U.S. strategy. Since that time, key indicators of governance have been rising, including commerce, school attendance and police recruitment, BG Nicholson said.

War's human cost has been high after 9 years of war. The Army is working on a variety of initiatives to ensure that its human resources remain strong and resilient even after nine years of conflict, Army and civilian leaders told an Institute of Land Warfare Contemporary Military Forum, "Manning the Army for the 21st Century," at the Association of the United States Army's Annual Meeting and Exposition Oct. 26.

The human cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has been high, said Lt. Gen. Thomas Bostick, deputy chief of staff of the army, G-1. "We're operating at nine years of war. Our soldiers, our civilians, our families that support them, are under a significant amount of stress. In all of the negative indicators that one might look at are unfortunately up, whether it's suicides, sexual harassment and assault, spouse abuse, child abuse, alcohol and drug abuse—sadly those numbers have all increased," he said.

But the Army is carrying out several programs to help mitigate that situation, he said. The "number one factor" in stress is too short a time between deployments, he said. Studies show that the optimum dwell time for a soldier is two to three years at home after a one-year deployment, and the army is working to get to that point so that soldiers have adequate time to recover after serving in a war.

More than 70 percent of the active duty army has deployed, said Maj. Gen. Gina Farrisee, commander of the Army Human Resources Command.

The most deployed officer specialties have been information operations, logistics, special forces, psychological operations, while for enlisted soldiers the most used professions are civil affairs, acquisition and psychological operations.

A temporary end-strength increase is helping to relieve some of that stress. The army now has the authority to have up to 569,400 soldiers, but by September of 2013 that number has to be back down to 547,400.

The Army added 5,000 soldiers in fiscal year 2009 and 9,000 in fiscal year 2010, but is now facing a difficult balance because it doesn't want to have too many soldiers in three years, Bostick said.

The Army is additionally challenged by an increasing number of "non-deployable" soldiers who, for various reasons like injuries, can not deploy with their units. In an average brigade combat team in 2007, about 390 of its soldiers were not deployable, Bostick said.

That number rose to 405 in 2008, 500 in 2009 and 570 this year. And when the army moves to a two-year dwell time after a deployment, that number will rise even more, Bostick said. "It's a huge issue across the army that we've got to fix."

National Guard leaders detail response to U.S. emergencies. Army National Guard leaders detailed the guard's role in response to emergencies in the continental United States during a panel Oct. 27 at the Association of the United States Army's Annual Meeting and Exposition.

Maj. Gen. Raymond W. Carpenter, acting director of the Army National Guard, noted 85 percent of incidents within the United States are responded at the local level, 11 percent at the state level, and rest are the critical events that require Title 10 response. This includes security, natural disaster, pandemic and chemical/biological/radiological/nuclear (CBRN) events.

State units have several joint Army and Air National Guard teams that can be called upon depending on the situation. For larger incidents that require interstate response, the guard has formed two Domestic All Response Teams (DART) that assist coordination of units when a state needs outside help. DART East and DART West identify needs throughout the 10 FEMA regions.

The critical response time is usually within the first 72 hours, said Col. Hank Amato, deputy J3 for the National Guard Bureau. That's the window for the best chances for life saving; after that, it becomes more of a recovery effort. Because of the unpredictability of events, "We don't have the chance to pre-deploy equipment," Carpenter said. "We have to think of what all the capacities are and build a proper response."

Joint guard teams include civil support teams, which assist civil authorities in CBRN incidents; CBRN response force packages, which support on-site commanders with mass casualty and decontamination, medical triage and treatment, and fatality search and recovery.

General Carter Ham focuses on training and building relationships. Ham said that two factors—the draw down in Iraq, increasing dwell time and NATO's sending more soldiers to Afghanistan are directly affecting his command—United States Army Europe.

Speaking Oct. 24 at the AUSA Chapter Presidents' Dinner held during the Association of the United State Army's Annual Meeting and Exposition, he said that with 47 nations—39 from Europe—now involved in Afghanistan, USAREUR's very highest priority "is training and building relationships."

Ham said that counter IED training is designed to "bring better interoperability among allied forces before they deploy to Afghanistan. "Almost everything we do is multinational."

Other changes include moving the command's headquarters from Heidelberg to Wiesbaden and awaiting a decision as to how many brigade combat teams will remain in Europe.

"What doesn't change is our core values." Ham said, "They aren't just words we take them to heart."

Drill sergeants' training emphasizes developing soldiers. Changes have been made to the Army's initial military training program to encourage drill sergeants to focus less on blind obedience, and more on developing soldiers "who want to be part of your team," said Command Sergeant Major for Initial Military Training John Calpena. Calpena spoke during the NCO Professional Development Forum Oct. 26 at the Association of the United States Army's Annual Meeting and Exposition.

Calpena said the Army has evolved to recognize that an effective fighting force needs soldiers who can think clearly and make good decisions—particularly when they are under the stress of combat—instead of soldiers who simply do what they are told.

Calpena added that changes have been made primarily to physical readiness and rifle marksmanship training, and then he turned the program over to the active-duty and reserve Drill Sergeants of the Year. Staff Sgt. Timothy Sarvis, the active-duty Drill Sergeant of the Year, explained changes in physical-readiness training. Much as elite athletes prepare for competition, Sarvis said, soldiers must prepare for combat. Sarvis said the PRT program now places more emphasis on fundamental movement skills to build agility, balance, coordination and flexibility, among other attributes. Four soldiers demonstrated various movements including the power jump, single-leg pushup and half-jack.

Sarvis also noted that physical training includes resiliency training—"that is a huge deal," he said—as well as training on the core Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. Sarvis added that for all the training, the Army is moving away from Power Point presentations and toward interactive, scenario-based training with videos. He also said that young recruits can particularly relate to gaming as well as using technology such as smart phone apps.

Staff Sgt. Melissa Solomon, the reserve Drill Sergeant of the Year, explained changes in the basic and advanced rifle marksmanship training. "We now know that every soldier can't get behind the weapon the same way," she said. Solomon said the new BRM strategy has 10 stages, with the first teaching the soldier to become comfortable with his or her weapon and the tenth being the soldier qualifies with 23 out of 40 hits. With 13 days of BRM followed by seven days of advanced training. "In 20 days, we have taken a civilian and trained them to engage in multiple 'gets' wearing a full kit," Solomon said.

Solomon also noted the importance of combative training when soldiers are unable to use their weapons. New impact suits will enable more realistic simulations of combat scenarios with a lower risk of injury.

Special Operations Forces are 'integral and essential.' Nine years of mostly unconventional and counterinsurgency conflict have stressed Army Special Operations Forces and required a significant increase in its end strength. But the conflict also has resulted in SOF becoming integral to the operations of the entire Army, a panel of Army leaders said Oct. 26.

Army SOF "is not a niche force. It is integral to what we do today," said Lt. Gen. Charles Jacoby, director for strategic plans and policy on the Joint Staff.

"Integral and essential to our mission," Brig. Gen. Kevin Mangum, commanding general of Army Special Operations Aviation Command, added at an Association of the United States Army Institute of Land Warfare Contemporary Military Forum.

"There was a time when they really were apart. We can't afford that any more," said Command Sgt. Maj. Jeffrey Mellinger, a former Army Ranger, now command sergeant major for Army Materiel Command. "The capabilities and skills those (SOF) soldiers bring is of tremendous value to other soldiers."

Lt. Gen. John Mulholland, commanding general Army Special Operations Command, gave a briefing on the organization, manning and operational tempo of his command, which is part way through a planned end strength increase of 23 percent by 2017. That gain includes the active component and National Guard SOF elements.

Army SOF includes the Special Forces, or Green Berets; Special Operations Aviation; the 75th Ranger Regiment; the Special Operations Sustainment Brigade, and units specializing in psychological operations and civil affairs.

A key part of the build-up is in Mangum's aviation assets, which have been heavily tasked in the expansive and rugged terrain of Afghanistan. Despite the increase, Army SOF will be unable to meet all of the combatant commanders' requests for its forces, Mulholland said. "The demand signal is growing faster than command growth. There's a limit to how fast you can grow special operations forces," he said. "If you grow too much, you are no longer special."

Lt. Gen. Daniel Bolger, Army deputy chief of staff for operations, plans and programs, said Congress has been very generous in providing most of the resources Army SOF needs. "The one resource we don't have is time."

Because the SOF units have been deploying at such a high rate—exceeding even the overall Army's ratio of gone as often as they are home—they only have time for their combat training between deployments. The professional military education suffers, Bolger said.