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New Modernization Plan Says Army Will Not Risk Unready Troops

The Army has compiled for Pentagon leaders a high-level strategy document that spells out how the service will modernize its forces and still fight today's wars.

According to sources and documents, the service has spent some \$5 billion to "buy back" operational risk assumed in recent years because resources were so heavily focused on investing in future programs. And, over the next few years, the Army will continue to shift its thinking on where and how it assumes risk -- extracting risk from its current force and trying to balance the scale that once tipped heavily in favor of future troops.

"Immediate demands are urgent, and fielding capabilities in the near term may outweigh protection of the program of record," according to an unsigned final draft of the modernization plan. "The Army will shift resource risk away from fighting soldiers."

Each year, the services deliver revised modernization plans to the defense secretary's force transformation office. The 2004 "Army Transformation Roadmap" is an update to last year's document, but is a beefed-up version of its predecessor, adding conceptual flesh to ideas outlined last year by Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter Schoomaker.

"It's all about enhancing capabilities for our front-line soldiers," said an Army official familiar with the report.

Schoomaker's vision of the future is of keen interest to defense observers speculating the fate of the Army's Future Combat System. Initiated before Schoomaker's arrival at the Pentagon -- and before the Army found itself embroiled in major conflicts abroad -- the FCS program has been the centerpiece of the Army's modernization effort. Sources confirmed last week that the service soon will announce major FCS schedule changes (see related story).

The Army road map does not detail any new procurement plans for FCS and cites the program's current time line. The document does, however, offer an overarching strategy that is unlikely to change: Tackle major challenges ahead in building FCS, like the network, and provide "program stability" for the effort through both research and procurement funding.

The document, submitted July 1 to the Pentagon's office of force transformation and still marked "pre-decisional," cites "three years of war" and the nation's "new strategic context" as primary catalysts for change in the service modernization strategy.

"Since publication of the 2003 [Army Transformation Roadmap], the Army has undertaken a significant shift in emphasis and prioritization of its near- and mid-term focus," according to the report. The shift is based on both senior-level planning guidance from the Office of the Secretary of Defense and "operational necessity," it adds.

"The imperative now lies in finding balance between sustained warfighting requirements and transforming to meet future challenges," the report states.

Another Army official said a key part of the plan is balancing risk evenly.

"It's almost a daily requirement" to monitor the "slope" of investments, the official said.

According to the recent road map, near-term needs are being fulfilled by programs like the Army's Rapid Fielding Initiative and Rapid Equipping Force that are designed to help the service find solutions to new problems and rush equipment to the field. For example, at one point the Army had no tactical or small unmanned aerial vehicles deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and no method to counter improvised explosive devices. Since then, 35 small UAVs and 432 devices to counter IEDs have been deployed into theater, according to the report.

Meanwhile, without providing more specifics, the plan says the Army has made \$17 billion worth of "divestment decisions" in the Army's fiscal year 2006 through FY-11 budget plan to fund "crucial transformation efforts."

In a subsequent chapter on risk, the Army says it plans to ensure the future force maintains its technological edge over potential adversaries through various initiatives, including spiral development.

"Through its effort to spiral capabilities forward, the Army is identifying promising technologies early in the acquisition process and spiraling these capabilities into the current force," the road map states.

The Army also is accelerating its Distributed Common Ground System program and increasing funding for the Aerial Common Sensor and UAV programs, according to the road map.

This year's road map required substantially less rewriting than the 2003 version, officials say, because last year's document was among the first formal strategies to be signed by Schoomaker. The new chief took office in August 2003; the transformation plan was due that November.

Since then, Schoomaker has initiated a number of major changes to the Army, including a sweeping reorganization of the force into more "modular" units and an initiative to move soldiers among various bases less often. The chief also began

to “rebalance” the capabilities found within the active duty and the reserves to reduce stress on units repeatedly deployed to combat zones.

Earlier this year, the Army completed a detailed, classified campaign plan that gives a year-by-year account of how Schoomaker’s new priorities will be implemented (*Inside the Army*, May 24, p1).

In putting together its transformation plan, the Army took a “snapshot” of the numerous initiatives under way and put it down on paper to tell OSD and Army components where the service is headed, the Army official said.

-- *Anne Plummer*