Senior Army Officials Outline Modernization Priorities in Senate Testimony

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In testimony that flew under the radar a few weeks back, four senior Army commanders **gave statements before the Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Air-Land** concerning the Fiscal Year 2016 budget request and the U.S. Army's Strategy, Readiness, and Equipment Modernization. In that testimony, the Army's officials made clear the detrimental impact that sequestration and the declining Army budget is having on the force's readiness. They also outlined how the Army is shifting funding to priorities that will enable it to maximize the use of the budget dollars it receives.

The priorities outlined during the testimony were as follows:

First, the Army will fully fund its Combat Training Centers (CTC). Specifically, more money will be dedicated to refresh technology at the National Training Center, Joint Readiness Training Center, and the Joint Multi-National Readiness Center. A particular area of investment will be new Instrumentation and Training Aids, Devices, Simulators, and Simulations (ITADSS) used to train Brigade Combat Teams. This priority fits well with previous statements by Army officials specifying that spending on virtual training tools and systems will be a focus in the coming years. This spending should benefit vendors providing cloud-based training capabilities as well, as the Army seeks to make use of the latest technology.

The Maneuver CTCs will also refresh obsolete instrumentation data and Observer/Controller Communications System network infrastructure that supports Forward Operating Base operations and Mission Rehearsal Exercises. The current system has experienced network outages that inhibit efficient training operations. Enhancing network security capabilities – wired and wireless – will be a priority here.

Second, the Army will protect its investments in Science and Technology (S&T) to enable the use of next generation capabilities like combat vehicle technology, lethality technologies, rotary aviation, watercraft, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance assets. For information technology vendors this means a focus on mobility and on good and services essential to mission command, such as "software applications for the Common Operating Environment, operations/intelligence network convergence efforts, and platform integration of network components in support of Operational Capability Sets in expeditionary tactical command posts."

Third, the Army will retain a particular focus on ISR assets like unmanned systems. This priority is reflected in the FY 2016 Army budget request for Research and Development. For R&D programs directly related to unmanned systems, the Army is requesting $218 million in FY 2016. Taking into account those programs which have a related unmanned system component, the requested budget climbs to just over $285 million. These totals are down from the more than $300 million the Army spent annually on unmanned systems in FY 2014 and 2015. Nevertheless, the requested amount indicates continued strong interest as the Army seeks ways to use technology to make up for the declining number of troops in the ranks.

Summing up, Army officials stressed that they will protect investments in technologies, particularly commercial-off-the-shelf technologies, that will help U.S. soldiers maintain overmatch capabilities against adversaries. The technologies mentioned during the testimony did not include cloud computing or big data analytics, but industry may rest assured that the Army is very interested in both of these things, especially for the collection and analysis of intelligence data that boosts the combat efficiency and lethality of U.S. forces.