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David Fitzgerald, the senior official performing the duties of the undersecretary of the Army, speaks during AUSA's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. (AUSA PHOTO)

Army must move faster to transform future force

Faced with increasingly complex technical, operational and financial challenges, the Army must move faster to transform the force, a senior leader said Tuesday at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama.

"We have to do more to overtake the rate at which our adversaries are transforming," said David Fitzgerald, the senior official performing the duties of the undersecretary of the Army. "We have to do it better, we have to do it faster, we have to do it together."

The Army is at a "pivotal moment," Fitzgerald said. "The character of warfare is changing before our eyes," he said. "Our adversaries are transforming."

This change demands a force that is continuously adapting and evolving. Citing the Army's transformation in contact initiative, which puts emerging technology in soldiers' hands for testing and experimentation, Fitzgerald said the concept "rightly recognized that a transformed, ready Army is not an end state." Instead, it's a process that includes working with warfighters, industry, developers and more.

"We've revolutionized before, from the Manhattan Project to pioneering GPS and the internet, and we can do it again," Fitzgerald said.

To achieve those goals, the Army must act with purpose and decisiveness, he said. This includes making sure the Army is a "better customer," one that

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Rainey: Transformation effort requires ‘team of teams’

In its quest to transform, the Army is pledging to be a better customer as it looks to industry for the latest technology and equipment.

“The only metric that matters is capability in the hands of the warfighter,” said Gen. James Rainey, commander of Army Futures Command, and the Army must make it easier for industry to understand what the service needs or is looking for. “You should not have to come to the Army and deal with three [program executive offices] or [program manager] surf through 40 of them,” Rainey said. “My commitment to you, the Army’s going to be a better customer on this journey. We need you on this.”

Speaking Thursday in a keynote address during the Association of the U.S. Army’s Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, Rainey said the Army can’t transform by itself. “It’s going to take a team of teams,” he said.

As it looks to the future, the Army’s people remain its No. 1 asymmetric advantage, Rainey said. American ground forces—soldiers, Marines,



Gen. James Rainey, commander of Army Futures Command, speaks during AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. (AUSA PHOTO)

special operations troops—remain the world’s premier land force, he said. “We’re absolutely going to need to do things like fight in cities, close in and fight enemies in horrific conditions,” Rainey said. “That last 500 meters, that’s not going away. That’s been constant throughout the history

of warfare. There’s no technological solution that’s going to offset that.”

At the same time, the Army faces disruptive and challenging times, Rainey said. “Adaptation cycles are compressing, complexity is going through the roof,” he said.

Among his observations, Rainey said, is the move toward data-centric warfare, which will help commanders make decisions faster and take their command posts on the move. He also is observing the merger of precision and mass.

“Most of us grew up looking at problems and deciding between a mass solution or a precision solution,” Rainey said. “It looks like ... technology is creating an opportunity to be precise and mass effects at the same time.”

The Army also is looking to integrate humans with machines. “We’re figuring out how to combine our great people with unmanned systems,” Rainey said. “What we’re trying to offset is the risk.”

As he looks to the future, Rainey said the Army must be adaptable and have endurance.

“The ability of our combat formations to shoot, move, communicate, train their [butt] off and be well-led by noncommissioned officers and officers, none of that is going away,” he said. “The characteristic I would value tremendously in any formation is the ability to adapt. This is an advantage for us. The time and energy we put into building leaders and teaching leaders how to think, not what to think, that offers a huge advantage for the U.S.”

The Army—and the nation—also will need endurance to sustain large-scale combat operations, Rainey said.

“Well-led, well-trained formations are what our enemies want no part of at all,” Rainey said. “We’ve got to keep our close-combat dominance, and we owe our soldiers and commanders in the joint force better formations.”



Soldiers assigned to the 2nd Cavalry Regiment run to the next obstacle on the obstacle course during a spur ride on Tuesday at the 7th Army Training Command’s Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany. (U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. RANDIS MONROE)

Mohan urges industry to help Army transform, innovate for the future

Futuristic scenarios involving telemaintenance, advanced manufacturing and the ingenuity of the American soldier are “exploding” across the Army, said Lt. Gen. Chris Mohan, deputy commanding general and acting commander of Army Materiel Command.

In remarks on Wednesday at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, Mohan called on industry to help the Army by working together to meet the rapid innovation taking place across the sustainment enterprise.

“We have a vision for the future that is not that far-fetched,” Mohan said. “We’re a blue-collar organization, and we’re doing blocking and tackling, and we know what that future looks like, and we know how to get there. We just have to have the intestinal fortitude and courage to do the right things, to pick winners and losers to accelerate successful initiatives.”

Evoking a scenario of what the future battlefield could look like, Mohan described a unit forward needing a part for a malfunctioning High Mobility Artillery Rocket System that’s delivered by an unmanned watercraft. Jumping on to a telemaintenance call, the crew talks with higher headquarters and to the engineer who designed the system.

The part is identified, produced through advanced manufacturing forward and delivered to the crew with an unmanned aerial system programmed, designed and developed to operate in contested environments.

“This is a future state, but let me assure you that we’re much closer to this, this future state, than we’ve ever been,” Mohan said, noting that the Army’s depots and innovation centers are 3D printing parts and devising new ways of delivering goods and lethality every day.



Lt. Gen. Chris Mohan, deputy commanding general and acting commander of Army Materiel Command, speaks during AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. (AUSA PHOTO)

Advanced manufacturing is happening across the Army, and soldiers are learning how to make parts, he said. Army depot contractors are going in larger numbers to make repairs to equipment, saving transportation costs of getting the equipment to the depots and boosting readiness among combat formations.

Addressing audience members, Mohan said, “We have to be agile, and this is where we really, really need your help, help us with our agility, challenge us.”

“I’ve got my list of things that we’re attacking that we have not been able to get over the finish line, that now we see opportunity to do that,” Mohan said. “I’m sure you all have your list, so working together, we can get there.”

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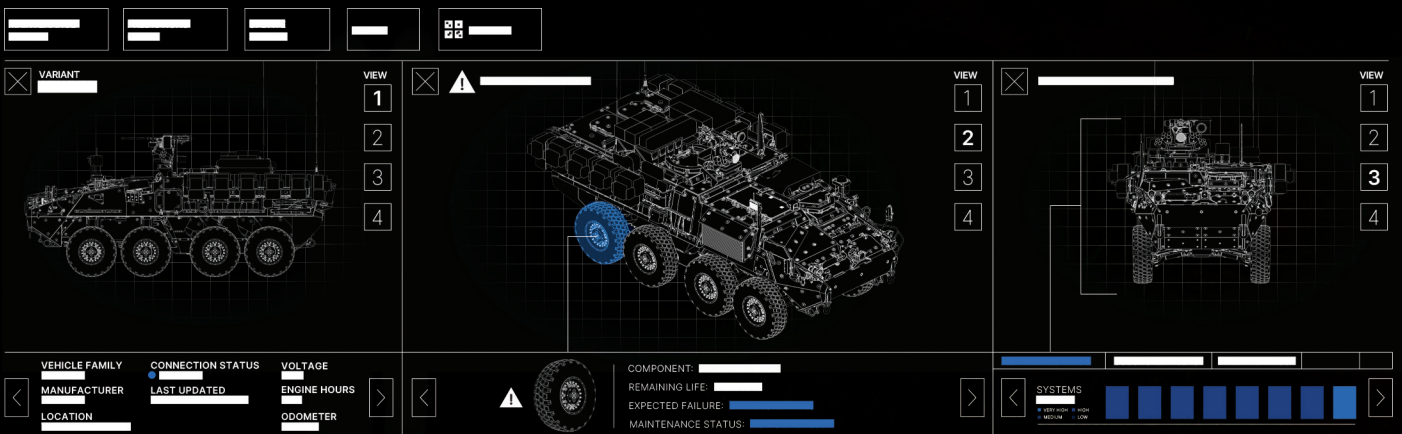
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Panel: Army must move quickly to retain warfighting edge

Rapidly evolving technology, including new weapons being used on the battlefield in Ukraine, is forcing the Army to move quickly to transform, a panel of experts said.

“We have to move quickly, we have to energize the system,” said Lt. Gen. Joseph Ryan, deputy Army chief of staff for operations, G-3.

Speaking Tuesday at the Association of the U.S. Army’s Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, Ryan said the Army’s transformation in contact initiative, which puts new technology in soldiers’ hands for testing and experimentation, emphasizes action. “It’s about the need to actually do, to actually transform,” he said.

As the Army ramps up for version 2.0, it is preparing to field more than 1,100 unmanned aerial systems, more than 250 electronic warfare systems, more than 2,000 mobility platforms, 1,200 counter-UAS systems and more. “We’re impacting more and more units across the Army with transformation in contact every day,” Ryan said.

In the 1st Cavalry Division, which just completed a rotation in Europe, leaders are working to ensure their formations absorb all the lessons learned, said Brig. Gen. Robert Born,



Soldiers assigned to the 1st Cavalry Division’s 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team maneuver their M1 Abrams tank during Exercise Flaming Thunder at Camp Herkus, Lithuania. (U.S. ARMY PHOTO)

the division’s deputy commanding general for maneuver. Those lessons include the critical role of division headquarters in the fight, he said. “The role of the division is absolutely important,” he said. “The assets and capabilities required to be successful is not resident or organic in a brigade combat team, and it never will be.”

The 1st Cavalry Division’s 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team is one of the units tapped for transformation in contact 2.0, said its commander, Col. Christopher Dempsey. “Armored brigade combat teams are way behind infantry brigade combat teams and Stryker brigade combat teams,” he said, regarding transfor-

mation. “That’s nobody’s fault. There is a lot of talk about transformation in contact 2.0, 1.0, but I’m interested in doing things about it, in experimenting and driving change.”

As the brigade prepares to receive new equipment, “we’re looking at and doing things in the organizational changes, the training aspect, leader development and preparing for the materiel to come,” Dempsey said. “I think the biggest thing, at least from my perspective, transformation in contact provides is the opportunity and freedom to experiment. I’ve been in the Army 25 years, and I don’t know if I’ve ever experienced an environment to experiment and make mistakes and try things.”

As the Army pushes forward with transformation in contact, Ryan said brigade commanders like Dempsey are working hard to innovate and transform. Some of the transformation in contact was born out of the realization that the Army already was taking immense risk by keeping obsolete or inadequate equipment or programs, he said.

“When are we going to fight? Whenever we do, we don’t know, but when we do, I’m confident [soldiers] will be able to fight and win,” Ryan said. “It’s our job to get them the equipment. ... We have more work to do.”

Fitzgerald

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reimagines how it produces requirements documents and enables industry to innovate and create, he said.

The Army must prioritize outcomes and lower costs, build resiliency in its supply chains and strive to gain greater agility in funding, Fitzgerald said. “We welcome open and continuing dialogue,” he said. “If there’s a better way to do business, we want to do it, and we want to do it now.”

Amid this push to transform, the Army must balance flat and uncertain budgets, Fitzgerald said. “Every

single dollar counts in the current fiscal environment,” he said. “To address this, we’ve begun systematically reviewing legacy programs and legacy requirements.”

Ultimately, “it’s not just about spending differently, it’s about thinking differently,” Fitzgerald said, as the Army pursues capabilities in areas such as artificial intelligence, additive manufacturing, unmanned aerial systems and long-range precision fires.

“These are and will remain a priority for immediate and enduring capabilities,” he said.

As Army leaders look to the future, they have a unique opportunity, Fitzgerald said. “The old ways of doing business are no longer working,” he said. “We have the absolute best soldiers in the world, but it’s our mandate to ensure those warfighters have the very best capabilities the world can provide.”

Fitzgerald urged the audience at Global Force, which included industry leaders, to work with the Army. “Let’s move faster, let’s think bigger, and let’s make sure the next revolutionary breakthrough happens with us,” he said.

Weimer drives initiative to refine enlisted promotions

Enlisted soldiers should be promoted based on how well they know their jobs, said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Weimer, who is driving an initiative to make that happen.

“The No. 1 thing we should be basing off whether or not you’re ready to be promoted is how good you are at your current job,” Weimer said Wednesday during a fireside chat at the Association of the U.S. Army’s Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. “Call me crazy, but that’s not where we’re at right now.”

Weimer found consensus from members of the Senior Enlisted Council, a group of senior NCOs from across the Army who advise him on the enlisted force, that a legitimate test to validate soldiers’ current skill level in their professions should be the “base for the promotion rubric.”

As it is now, he said, soldiers are being promoted for having checked a box by completing required professional military education without having been tested on whether they know their actual job.

“It’s not the Army I grew up in,” Weimer said, noting that members of the Senior Enlisted Council “all agreed, and it wasn’t that difficult, we really should reset that as one of the weighted data points for promotion.”

For close to nine months, pilots to develop such a test have been conducted at the Army’s Medical Center of Excellence at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston and the Fires Center of Excellence at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. The results “haven’t been great,” Weimer said.

However, once soldiers were told what the test was for, they improved dramatically because, Weimer said, “once you remove the ambiguity ... and let soldiers know what the standard is, soldiers will rise to the occasion.”

Weimer expects to be able to pres-



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Michael Weimer, right, speaks with retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel Dailey, AUSA's vice president of NCO and Soldier Programs, during the association's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)

ent a full plan to Army senior leaders by the first quarter of fiscal year 2026, including a plan on how and where the test could be administered. He believes testing could take place at soldiers’ home stations without the need for a brick-and-mortar facility. He added that soldiers in the National Guard and Army Reserve also will be tested for promotion, but it may

take longer to implement.

“What’s more important, 60 credit hours of online self-study from your online university or the data point of how good you are at your current job?” Weimer said. “I would ask the crowd without answering what’s more important for a promotion consideration. I think we know the answer to that.”



Sgt. Kevin Tran, left, assigned to the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, is promoted from corporal to sergeant in Sembach, Germany. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. YESENIA CADAVID)

Experimentation, speed key to future acquisition efforts

Lethality, speed and cost efficiency are some of the top factors the Army must consider when evaluating and acquiring new technology and capabilities for the force, a panel of experts said during the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama.

"The days of programs of record for non-capital equipment are probably over," said retired Lt. Gen. Neil Thurgood, a former director of the Army's Rapid Capabilities and Critical Technologies Office who is now a senior vice president at Anduril.

Instead, the Army should "throw away" things every two to four years for the next iteration," he said. "Industry has to get on board, and the Army just needs to throw things away, which is super hard for the Army, by the way," Thurgood said. "We are hoarders of people and equipment."

During the panel discussion, "Agile Acquisition for Continuous Transformation," Lt. Gen. Robert Collins, principal military deputy to the assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology and director of the Army Acquisition Corps, said the Army must focus, first and foremost, on capabilities that are lethal.

Speed, not only on the battlefield but also the ability to be adaptive and agile, is another critical factor. Cost efficiency also is important, as is whether a capability can be fielded at scale, Collins said. "We are in a unique service," he said. "We've got to think about the tyranny of scale in how we do things," he said.

Today, the Army faces the reality that commercial technology in some cases is outpacing military technology, Collins said. "It wasn't always the case," he said. "Acknowledging that is probably one area we need to look to."

One area where the Army has changed its approach is software,



Subject-matter experts discuss Army acquisition initiatives during AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. (AUSA PHOTO)

said Jennifer Swanson, deputy assistant secretary of the Army for data, engineering and software. "A lot of the work that we've done over the past three years in the Army to change how we approach software is not because we're developing the software," she said. "It's being able to adopt the software [industry] is developing."

This includes the Modular Open Systems Approach, where officials seek capabilities that can plug and play into an open architecture.

As the Army continues its trans-

formation, it must continue to experiment and test new and emerging capabilities, said Col. Michael Kaloostian, director of transport and network security for Next Generation Command and Control at Army Futures Command. "Until you get technology in the field, in the dirt, into soldiers' hands, you're not going to get the information you need to inform decisions," he said.

Using Project Convergence as an example, Kaloostian said, "We had soldiers giving us feedback on what they think is right and if we're on the right track," he said.

Collins agreed. "I would absolutely underscore the value of not only experimentation," he said. Not only does it allow the Army to learn quickly what's working and what's not, it also provides "that feedback early directly to the folks that are coding, developing, bending metal and others," Collins said.

As the Army expands its transformation in contact initiative to more units across the force, it must not lose sight of outcomes, Collins said. "Is it effective? Is it suitable? Is it survivable? We always need to be looking at the outcomes," he said.



Journeyman electrician Waylon Hackett, of the Army Corps of Engineers Nashville District, solders wiring analog inputs during installation of a supervisory control and data acquisition system at the Dale Hollow Dam Power Plant in Celina, Tennessee. (U.S. ARMY/LEON ROBERTS)

Mason: Army must transform to be ‘better customer’

To provide soldiers with the capabilities they need for the next fight, Army acquisition must transform with the rest of the force, a senior Army leader said.

“I don’t think I have to tell you we’re living in kind of interesting times right now,” said Patrick Mason, the senior official performing the duties of the assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology.

That uncertainty, coupled with the confluence of geostrategic realities, the nation’s security needs and the acceleration of technology, “perhaps presents the tipping point that will foster new approaches to defense acquisition,” he said Thursday during a keynote presentation to close the Association of the U.S. Army’s Global Force Symposium and Exposition.

Army Secretary Dan Driscoll’s priorities are to make the Army a better customer, eliminate bureaucratic barriers and outdated systems, and continue the transformation in contact initiative, Mason said. “Army transformation is not just about spending differently, or, as I say, buying different stuff,” Mason said. “It’s about thinking differently.”

For the Army to be a better customer, it must understand the capabilities it needs and reimagine the way in which it produces requirements documents, Mason said. “This is a hard journey,” he said.

The Army also must iterate faster, experiment and achieve delivery at scale, he said. “We need to bring all this together to optimize lethality at speed and scale while optimizing cost,” he said, adding, “The need for speed—it matters more than ever.”

“We have never faced the confluence of events like we face now,” Mason said. “The adaptation cycles that are necessary because of the confluence of these events, and how you determine what you need ... in this technological era we’re in, with a changing threat, bringing all this



Top: Patrick Mason, the senior official performing the duties of the assistant secretary of the Army for acquisition, logistics and technology, speaks during AUSA's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. (AUSA PHOTO)

Bottom: A soldier assigned to the 169th Field Artillery Brigade performs maintenance checks and services on target acquisition equipment at an undisclosed location in the U.S. Central Command area of operations. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. NICHOLAS RAMSHAW)



together is an incredibly tough proposition.”

But the Army is up for the challenge, Mason said.

“Congress has given us lots of acquisition authorities [so] we can go out and execute,” he said. “It’s challenging the way we think, but it’s our responsibility as leaders to move that forward. We’re adapting our approach to ensure that we operate at speed and scale, producing the needed lethality with the right affordability.”

Mason urged the Army’s industry

partners to work in lockstep with the service. “We have the finest soldiers ... and we have to work tirelessly to ensure our warriors have the best capabilities so we can deter aggression, and when they are called, they can fight and win decisively,” he said.

Forums such as Global Force enable the Army and industry to come together, which builds relationships, trust and collaboration, and expands professional dialogue, Mason said.

“This is a team sport,” he said, as he lauded AUSA for providing the forum for those conversations.

Army sustainers must think differently for future fight

Power generation, autonomous capabilities and more efficient operations are among the top efforts underway in the Army's sustainment enterprise as it works to transform for the future fight.

"We are absolutely thinking differently about how we sustain the future Army," said Maj. Gen. Michelle Donahue, commanding general of Army Combined Arms Support Command and the Sustainment Center of Excellence.

Speaking Wednesday on a panel during the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, Donahue and her fellow panelists outlined recent lessons learned from the Project Convergence capstone event and the transformation in contact effort in the 25th Infantry Division.

The 25th Infantry Division's sustainment brigade has been involved in the Army's transformation in contact initiative for almost a year, when the division's 2nd Brigade Combat Team was tapped as one of the first three units for the effort.

During that period of experimentation, leaders identified two key pieces of equipment—the Infantry Squad Vehicle and a Solar Stik that can be used as a solar-powered generator, said Col. Christopher Johnson, commander of the 25th Division Sustainment Brigade.



Military and civilian leaders discuss transformation in the Army's sustainment enterprise during AUSA's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama. (AUSA PHOTO)

On a recent training rotation, soldiers from 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, brought 95 Infantry Squad Vehicles instead of Humvees, Johnson said. The sustainment brigade was able to support the soldiers for 15 days of force-on-force training with 2,700 gallons of gas, he said.

Infantry Squad Vehicles "sip on gas," compared to Humvees, which "drink diesel fuel like a college kid on spring break," Johnson said. During a similar exercise the year before, to support the Humvees, the sustainment brigade pushed over 45,000 gallons of gas, he said.

Reducing the demand for sustainment items such as fuel "lessens the burden on the enterprise, and it makes our job easier," Johnson said, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, with its far-flung locations.

The other addition that made a big difference was the Solar Stik, which Johnson described as a large power bank. It enabled the unit to go from running its generators 24 hours a day to just six hours a day, which meant a smaller and quieter footprint for the command post, Johnson said.

"Overall, it's a big win," he said.

Power generation and reducing soldiers' load are critical missions, said Brig. Gen. Shane Upton, director of the Contested Logistics Cross-Functional Team. "We're figuring out how to produce things like power so we're not hauling towed generators around," he said. "We're going to have a big power demand on some of the weapons we're bringing to the battlefield."

One example is the new hypersonic weapon, Upton said. "That power demand is not going to reduce," he said. "We have to work with you in industry to figure out how we provide that power at the point of need or where we need it strategically."



Soldiers of the 10th Mountain Division train with the Infantry Squad Vehicle at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. (U.S. ARMY/PFC. RAYONNE BISSANT)



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New infantry initiative builds squad as one system

Mismatched helmets, uniforms and night-vision goggles characterize the Army's nine-man infantry squads, and the service wants to do something about it—and fast.

"We recognize the squad is the most complex and variable weapon system on the battlefield," said Brig. Gen. Phillip Kiniery, director of the Soldier Lethality Cross-Functional Team and commandant of the U.S. Army Infantry School.

The Army fights formations, but the problem is the squad was "put together with no thought to how they interact, much less how they integrate," Kiniery said Tuesday at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama.

"We've been focusing our efforts on the individual soldier for so long, we've burdened them with redundant capabilities developed in a stovepipe and added extra weight," said Kiniery, who participated in a panel discussion and later spoke at a Warriors Corner presentation about his efforts to accelerate the architecture to field the squad as a system, not individual soldiers.

Kiniery explained that the "Squad as a System" effort centers on the understanding that soldiers serve in different roles within the squad, and "they work together as one system."

As chief of infantry, Kiniery noted, he's responsible for what he described as a "confederation of tribes," such as airborne, mechanized, Ranger and arctic formations, each with its own infantry culture and equipment. While those formations may have some specialized requirements, Kiniery wants to establish a baseline uniformity for every one of the Army's 1,800 infantry squads.

To achieve that, a test is being developed with the U.S. Army Combat Capabilities Development Command to evaluate a squad's shoot, move and communicate functions to come



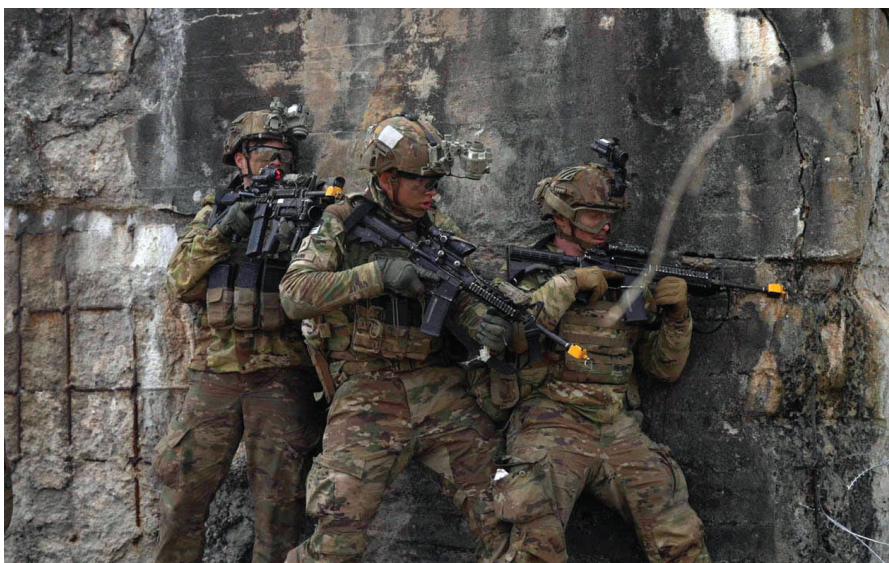
Brig. Gen. Phillip Kiniery, director of the Soldier Lethality Cross-Functional Team and commandant of the U.S. Army Infantry School, speaks at a Warriors Corner presentation during AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)

up with metrics that can apply across the infantry. "So, if industry comes back with a piece of equipment and says, 'Hey, this is more lethal, this will make a squad more lethal,' instead of us just jumping into it, we're like, 'OK, well, let's test it against our system,'" Kiniery said.

Reducing soldiers' load is not a new idea, nor is it novel, he said. "We've been talking about it for genera-

tions," Kiniery said. "It's an extremely hard problem to solve, but we, as Army leaders, would be derelict in our duty if we quit trying to solve it."

Kiniery asked industry for help. "What we plan to do is establish a common architecture that they can build to," he said. "We must ensure we are no longer producing things in a vacuum. We must reduce redundancy and increase combat power."



Soldiers with the 3rd Infantry Division prepare to breach a bunker during a squad training exercise March 15 at the Zagan Training Complex in Poland. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. MCCANTS MARQUIS)



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Agile approach critical to boosting capabilities quickly



Soldiers assigned to the 18th Field Artillery Brigade, XVIII Airborne Corps, fire a rocket from the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System during a live-fire exercise on March 11 at Fort Stewart, Georgia. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. BERNABE LOPEZ)

Quickly scaling capabilities requires an “iterative, agile” approach in close partnership with industry, a senior Army officer said.

During a panel discussion on continuous transformation and scaling change at speed, Brig. Gen. Cain Baker, director of the Future Vertical Lift Cross-Functional Team, said that continuous transformation can only work in partnership with industry.

“We’re not just looking for a one-type capability that we buy and put inside a formation and leave it. ... That is not the partnership that we’re doing with industry,” Baker said Thursday at the Association of the U.S. Army’s Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama.

“It’s an iterative, agile approach that we broaden the capability across multiple partners so we can scale as

quickly as possible when the need is there,” Baker said.

When it comes to continuous transformation and the ability to scale at speed, Baker said, the cross-functional teams are guided by three principles, beginning with the volatile and rapidly changing global landscape influenced by technology.

Secondly, just as combatant commanders forge partnerships with their geographic area partners, the cross-functional teams do the same with industry partners “with a mindset of expanding an industrial base so we can actually scale,” Baker said.

Brig. Gen. Rory Crooks, director of the Long-Range Precision Fires Cross-Functional Team, said the Army must optimize for production rather than performance. “We have to reframe our requirements to incentivize that,” he said.

When it comes to long-range precision fires, Crooks said, “we absolute-

ly need precision, we need mass. We need mass precision.”

“What we try to get when we optimize performance is that 5% of extra performance you might squeeze out starts to drive the cost so high that I can’t acquire these things at volume, and that’s a problem for me when I need a lot of mass or mass precision,” Crooks said.

With long-range precision fires, he said, the Army should avoid being “too prescriptive” because there now are multiple options outside of the traditional military acquisition channels.

“Now I can talk to industry that’s very competent about rockets that didn’t exist 10 years ago in the same way it does today,” Crooks said. “We have to come up with a tranche sort of method ... with certain procurement demand signals that would make it worthwhile, economically feasible, for our industry partners.”

NCOs play 'huge role' in transformation at every level

Since the Army's earliest days, NCOs have driven transformation by identifying requirements, and they are still driving transformation today, a panel of senior enlisted leaders said.

"The NCO at the tactical edge can help with our scientists, except the scientists are building things in a nice little clean laboratory, and [NCOs] are out there rolling up their sleeves in the dirt ... [and] giving candid feedback on form, factor, functionality, all the little things that they're going to try to break," said Command Sgt. Maj. T.J. Holland, senior enlisted leader for Army Forces Command.

In remarks on Wednesday during a panel discussion at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, Holland was joined by Command Sgt. Maj. Brian Hester of Army Futures Command and Command Sgt. Maj. Raymond Harris of Army Training and Doctrine Command to talk about the role of the NCO in driving transformation.

Using the 82nd Airborne Division as an example, Holland said, "if you want to find out if something works, you can put it in the hands of an 82nd paratrooper. They're purpose-built to break things, right? That's exactly what the NCO's role is out there, to make sure that it doesn't break in times of need when you're in a two-way live-fire."

The Army, Holland said, is "exponentially learning" by having elevated foundational training to the division level and putting "divisions in the dirt" to experiment, assess and validate new technology.

NCOs can play a "huge role" in organizational innovation, too, Hester said. "When we bring a new capability to the formation, we might think that we're going to use it and fight with it in one way, and when we deliver it and [NCOs] take it to the dirt to start to use it, ... where are they



Senior enlisted leaders from across the force address a panel discussion during AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)

seeing opportunities organizationally to change?" Hester said. "Is the rifle squad we have today going to be the same rifle squad we'll have five or 20 years from now?"

With the proliferation of experimentation on equipment and even formations, Harris pointed out that at some point, it's got to come togeth-

er in doctrine and the codification of systems.

"There's lots of experimentation and testing all these things, but then we've got to have the team that triages it and determines what needs to be doctrine, what doesn't need to be doctrine, what's good for just a unit to have as a [tactic, technique and procedure] or a local standard operating procedure, and what actually informs how we're going to train this and develop the materiel that's going to go on the battlefield for our soldiers," Harris said.

Harris also pointed out that, while some formations have been designated as transformation in contact units with a mission to test, experiment, evaluate and give feedback on cutting-edge equipment and technology, every formation should be combat-ready and lethal.

He noted that NCOs should be thinking about how their formations are organized with the equipment they have on hand and how they'll be successful in combat. "You may not get that kit for 10 years," he said. "Let the transformation in contact formations really focus on that for you, that's what they're designed and why they were picked to do it."



Sgt. Mahdi Amirouche, assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, prepares to launch a drone March 7 during Project Convergence-Capstone 5 at Fort Irwin, California. (U.S. ARMY/SGT. MATTHEW WANTROBA)

Institutional Army must adapt, adopt real-time lessons

Amid the fastest transformation the Army has ever seen, the service must make sure the institutional force is moving forward alongside its fighting formations, said Maj. Gen. Christopher Beck, commanding general of the Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence.

Speaking on a panel during the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, titled "Institutional Training and Transformation," Beck said that transformation is a team sport.

Nested with every transformation in contact organization should be an element from the institutional Army, whether it's Army Training and Doctrine Command, the Combined Arms Center, the centers of excellence or the schoolhouses, Beck said.

"We've got to ensure that we're learning not just the materiel domain lessons, but the entirety of the



Maj. Gen. Christopher Beck, commanding general of the Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence, speaks during AUSA's Global Force Symposium. (AUSA PHOTO)

DOTMLPF," he said, referring to doctrine, organization, training, materiel, leadership and education, personnel, facilities and policy. "That's what makes this so important."

Resources still determine how quickly and thoroughly programs of instruction are updated at the schoolhouses, but "at the same time, every one of them, every one of the

commandants, are making real-time changes to ensure that our young leaders are graduating and they're ready to lead in the Army," Beck said.

Leaders also continue to look for different ways to incorporate lessons learned from ongoing operations or exercises, Beck said. As an example, a team from the Combined Arms Center went to Europe to capture lessons learned from the fighting in Ukraine. Upon their return, the team briefed Army senior leaders, but those lessons also were "immediately" shared to each center of excellence and regiment, Beck said.

Without capturing those lessons, "we're not going to be able to sustain it," he said. "So, at the end of the day, this means that we require everybody to be part of this discussion. This is deliberate transformation, and ultimately continuous transformation, that drives lethality in our warfighting and [allows] us to deliver combat-ready formations."

Experiments and teamwork drive Army transformation

Through continuous experimentation and close coordination, the Army's transformation has rapidly evolved, a senior Army leader said.

Using the first Project Convergence experiment in 2020 as an example, Lt. Gen. David Hodne, director of the Futures and Concepts Center at Army Futures Command, said it was clear that the cross-functional teams established to focus on each of the Army's modernization priorities needed to work together.

"We realized if we didn't coordinate with each other, we would actually potentially go in different directions," Hodne said Tuesday at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama.

Hodne, a former director of the Soldier Lethality Cross-Functional



Lt. Gen. David Hodne, director of the Futures and Concepts Center at Army Futures Command, addresses AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium. (AUSA PHOTO)

Team, said the teams were determined to "make sure ... they could link sensors and shooters with the technology we're pursuing. That's what converging our capabilities was, where we developed that, it was the first one."

As the fifth iteration of Project

Convergence gets underway, the event will extend across the Indo-Pacific into the Philippines, Tahiti, Japan and Australia, Hodne said. "You can see the evolution" that has taken place each year since the first one, he said.

This year's Project Convergence, which tests new technologies and capabilities in the dirt, began at the corps level and below. When the second part begins next month, Hodne said, it will be "all the way to the corps [joint task force] level all the way down to the edge, the edge being the rifle squad on point, and we're going to do it across the geographical distance."

"If we can converge that data-centric command-and-control from the combatant command to the corps, and the corps to the squad ... we can be far more effective," Hodne said.

Plumb: Small ideas can have 'transformative potential'

Driving transformation on a large scale begins with small ideas derived from observations made in everyday life, said Radha Plumb, former chief digital and AI officer for the Department of Defense.

In remarks on Tuesday at a Generation Next Forum at the Association of the U.S. Army's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, Plumb pointed out that in any organization, people who are starting out may not feel their ideas are big enough to mention, much less be implemented, by more experienced teammates.

"Most of us are keen observers in our own environment of what's working and what's not, and yet, at the end of the day, a lot of times those ideas never go beyond us having informal chats or complaints about how ineffective or inefficient something is," Plumb said.

Still, she said, there is "transformative potential" in how those little ideas can be translated into action over time.

"I think a lot of times we stall out on applying those little ideas because we assume those ideas don't



Emerging leaders network and learn from industry and military leaders at the Generation Next Forum during AUSA's Global Force Symposium. (AUSA PHOTO)

matter," Plumb said. "You think to yourself, 'Well, who am I? I'm this junior person. I've got three or four layers above me. All of them need to approve it. I'm not important enough for these people to listen to.'"

Acknowledging that she has felt that way too, overwhelmed by "what needs to be navigated, unmotivated

because it basically feels impossible to make progress," Plumb encouraged forum participants to put their small ideas into place consistently over long periods of time.

Plumb urged participants to focus on managing people, including the boss, to motivate and incentivize them to get results. She encouraged leaders to "lean into the process" of navigating a bureaucracy, to move slowly, deliberately and consistently. She also pointed out the importance of managing themselves, to use their "superpowers to get results."

"Experiment, rinse and repeat, and do it over and over and over again until you start getting something that looks right and then figuring out how to buy that thing at scale and get the licenses you need," Plumb said.

Hosted by AUSA's Center for Leadership, the Generation Next Forum provides an interactive workshop for emerging leaders to network and learn from industry and military leaders. This year's event featured about 75 participants and the theme, "Empowering Tomorrow's Leaders: Navigating AI in Dynamic Environments."



Radha Plumb, former chief digital and AI officer for the Department of Defense, addresses a Generation Next Forum hosted by AUSA's Center for Leadership during the association's Global Force Symposium and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)

Scenes from Global Force 2025



Soldiers and civilians interact on the exhibit floor during the AUSA Global Force Symposium and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)



Members of AUSA's national headquarters staff speak with soldiers and defense industry representatives during AUSA's 2025 Global Force Symposium and Exposition. (AUSA PHOTO)



Attendees at AUSA's Global Force Symposium and Exposition in Huntsville, Alabama, including soldiers, defense industry representatives, AUSA members and more, explore new technologies and networking opportunities in the exhibit hall. (AUSA PHOTO)

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