



*Under Secretary of the Army Ryan D. McCarthy discusses the role sustainment will have in the new Army Futures Command.*



# Modernizing at the Speed of Relevance:

## *An Interview With Under Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy*

■ By Arpi Dilanian and Matthew Howard

As the 33rd Under Secretary of the Army, Ryan D. McCarthy is leading the way in building readiness for the future. Between his experiences as a proven industry leader and his proud service as an Army Ranger, McCarthy is now transforming the way the Army does business. We sat down with him to discuss the new Army Futures Command and the role sustainment will play in the Army's modernization efforts.

### *Why is it time for the Army Futures Command?*

If you look at the past 17 years of conflict, in large measure the Army invested against irregular warfare and counterinsurgency-type combat operations. We've focused on this significant national security challenge

that our country faces, and these asymmetric threats will probably be ongoing for the rest of my life. But during that same time period, near-peer competitors have made significant strides in the growth of their economies and their military modernization. When you look at it from that standpoint, there's a balance we need to achieve to deal with different threats.

Considering the speed at which technology is moving in the world today, we have an industrial age model of how we do business. We're slow, and we have a lot of people weighing in on decisions. Our authorities and responsibilities are spread out across all of our major commands, and we don't have formalized relationships. This leads to incremental growth, and it's hard to get business done. With the speed of innovation in the

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world, we can't keep pace with vendors and then scale a concept to an institution the size of a country. We have to get faster.

How do you get business done? You know people. You know what their equities are, what's important to them, and how to get things moving. If you look at the way we've organized the Futures Command, a lot of it is fusing people together so they have formal relationships and greater collaboration and can move information faster to get an outcome quicker.

It's all about better rigor, better relationships, better ideas, and getting them faster. From this macro standpoint of where the world is shifting, we recognize that a change in the Army's business model is essential to continuing to evolve with threats the same way we have for 243 years.

***What is the end goal for the Army Futures Command?***

If you look at the way we do materiel development design, bringing all of those capabilities under one roof is the ultimate end state. We want signature systems to be designed according to the Chief's [Chief of Staff of the Army's] priorities in a relevant time frame. So bringing these capabilities together to have the maximum utility of every investment and simplification in the interpretation of requirements is the outcome we're looking for.

How are we doing from that standpoint? The foundational elements of the command will be the Army Capabilities Integration Center and the Research, Development and Engineering Command. We're in the process of developing the policy guidance and execution order to start moving those organizations together.

We've also announced the key sub-command elements of the Futures Command: Futures and Concepts, Combat Development, and Combat Systems. The cross-functional teams (CFTs) that we stood up last fall fold in underneath these three command elements, and the combat systems

and program managers are already assigned to those CFTs.

We picked Austin as the location for the command group of the Futures Command headquarters. All these pieces will be coming to a head as we reach initial operational capability.

***How are the secretariat and the Department of the Army staff working together on this effort?***

I've been blessed to have a wonderful partner in Gen. James McConville. It's kind of like the heavens parted that I get him as my wingman given the unique characteristics of the operational roles he's had. He's had six years on the Army staff, and he's the longest serving division commander in the history of the Army. He did more than three years with the 101st [Airborne Division].

Because he and I talk so many times every day—he's one of the last people I talk to before I go to bed at night—we are linked shoulder to shoulder in bringing the strength of the secretariat and Army staff together.

Whether we are at investment meetings with CFTs or working on procurement decisions, having both of us there brings the strength of this Headquarters, Department of the Army, together. It moves decisions faster and provides succinct guidance that is heard at one place and time, as well as moves the delegations of authorities and resources more quickly.

***Can you discuss the importance of partnering with industry to leverage private-sector innovation?***

That's one of the foundational elements of what Futures Command will do for us. We look to industry to solve problems and bring us solutions. I try to meet with industry leaders as much as possible so I understand where technologies are going.

The Secretary of the Army Dr. Mark Esper, in particular, has a program where we bring in senior industry officials every week to meet with

the Army's senior leaders, and we're starting to see the dividends of those investments.

For companies that are vendors for us, managing those relationships helps them understand what we want out of a product or a service. Henry Stimson, Secretary of War during World War II, once said, "If you are going to try to go to war, in a capitalist country, you have to let business make money out of the process or business won't work."

Clearly we want them to be successful, but we have to communicate to them what exactly we want. And we have to be consistent so they can invest in their products and services, allow them to evolve, and bring the cost down.

As my old boss, [former] Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, used to say, relationships are the grease that runs our government. It is a relationship of push and pull with industry. When you have a problem with a system, you work through that issue together. If you don't have those relationships, you can't get through the hard times together.

### ***How important is sustainment to the Army's modernization efforts?***

Sustainment is a key performance parameter with every investment we make. You go into a death spiral with a weapon system if you can't sustain its performance and absorb the cost in the out-years. For every decision we make, I make sure the sustainment is addressed. It's a variable you have to solve or you won't get an investment dollar out of me.

One of the things that has been unique in standing up the Futures Command is the major commands (the Training and Doctrine Command, the Forces Command, and the Army Materiel Command) have played instrumental roles in mentoring CFTs. Gen. Gus Perna's leadership, for example, is ensuring the sustainment community is integrated into every CFT.

For every weapon system we're de-

signing, one of the main things we're looking at in our key performance parameters is the life-cycle management. Getting a life-cycle plan in place that's not only cost-efficient for managing and upgrading these systems over time, but also keeps operational rates up, is absolutely critical. Gen. Perna has helped each of the CFT leaders really think through the long-term investment of these weapons systems.

So often in the Department of Defense we don't get it right. And it's not just the Army; it's everybody because we're all focused on performance. But if you can't move it and you can't sustain it, it's not going to help you very much. Gen. Perna has gotten those CFT leaders to think very differently about the problem set. These qualified, post-brigade command officers are now coming in and talking about how they're going to lay in their sustainment plans over time, and it really shows the culture is changing.

### ***As new technologies are fielded, how do you foresee logistics evolving?***

As the Army modernizes, we can't become so overly sophisticated that we can't move. It's that simple. Speed is a key variable and characteristic of being successful in combat, and we will lose that if we become too heavy and too complex. Three initiatives come to mind.

The first initiative is Army pre-positioned stocks. We have made demonstrable gains in laying these equipment sets worldwide and configuring them for combat. Having those pre-positioned capabilities will increase the flow of moving assets and personnel for contingency operations.

The second is additive manufacturing. I recently toured facilities at Rock Island Arsenal, Illinois, where the Army Materiel Command is championing this initiative. Additive manufacturing will fundamentally change how we do business by reducing the cost of the parts, im-

proving equipment on-hand, and potentially bringing down the weight of both the repair parts we're shipping worldwide and our weapon systems as a whole. It is a game-changing capability that can get our systems back up and running within hours as opposed to weeks or months. I'm very excited about this and want to help as much as I can.

The third, and really the foremost, are the fundamentals. It's all about blocking and tackling—looking at equipment on-hand and really focusing in on the parts. It's not glamorous, but it's got teeth. And that's really the difference in keeping Abrams and Bradleys up and running so units can have high operational rates with their key weapons systems.

### ***You've served at both the tactical and strategic levels. What advice do you have for Soldiers coming into the Army today?***

Study your profession. This was the same advice I was given when I was about to go on active duty. Really make every hour count to prepare yourself for getting that awesome responsibility of becoming a platoon leader when you're 22 or 23 years old. Use every opportunity you have to prepare yourself and to learn about your profession.

And listen to your noncommissioned officers. My father, who was an enlisted Soldier during the Vietnam War, gave me that advice. Your noncommissioned officers are the ones who will get you through the longest days of your life.

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Arpi Dilanian is a strategic analyst in the Army G-4's Logistics Initiatives Group. She holds a bachelor's degree from American University and a master's degree from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

Matthew Howard is a strategic analyst in the Army G-4's Logistics Initiatives Group. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Georgetown University.