

Chief of staff: Most signature systems to be fielded by 2023, people still No. 1 priority

By Thomas Brading, Army News Service 15 October 2021



Gen. James C. McConville, the Army's chief of staff, speaks at the Association of the U.S. Army Annual Meeting and Exposition in Washington, D.C., Oct. 12, 2021. (Sgt. 1st Class Craig Cantrell)

WASHINGTON -- Twenty four of the Army's "31+4 signature systems" will be in Soldiers' hands by fiscal year 2023 as part of the Army's ongoing modernization efforts, the chief of staff said Tuesday.

Even with new equipment on the horizon, the Army's No. 1 priority will remain its people, said Gen. James C. McConville during a speech at the Association of the U.S. Army Annual Meeting and Exposition.

"Putting people first means taking care of our people so our people can remain ready and transform for the future," he said, noting that readiness and modernization will still be top priorities.

Among the service's modernization priorities are long-range precision fires, next-generation combat vehicles, future vertical lift, network, air and missile defense, and Soldier lethality capabilities.

In 2017, the Army announced 31 modernization efforts and four more were later added for directed energy and hypersonic systems.

The military's first hypersonic missile, capable of traveling five times the speed of sound, will be fielded by fiscal year 2023, McConville said. Other missile capabilities are slated to be available around the same time, including a mid-range missile capable of targeting ships and a precision strike missile.

The Future Long-Range Assault Aircraft program has also been accelerated and a prototype will be chosen later this year, he said.

The Next-Generation Squad Weapon and Optionally Manned Fighting Vehicle are slated to have prototypes by fiscal year 2023, while eight prototypes of the Robotic Combat Vehicle remain ahead of schedule and will be tested, too, he said.

The Army also plans to have prototypes of directed energy-based counter-unmanned aircraft systems soon, McConville said, which are needed against enemy UASs that could be as destructive as improvised explosive devices in the future.

McConville added the Army is modernizing its command-and-control systems, technology and doctrine. Some of the new technology will be on display during the second Project Convergence series of exercises.

During Project Convergence 21, or PC21, the Army will test over 100 technologies across 20 sites with over 5,000 participants. This year, the Army's network, which underpins the service's modernization enterprise, will be tested, he said.

"Project Convergence is our in-the-dirt experimentation to inform how the Army will fight and organize in the future," McConville said. "By linking all sensors to the best shooter through the right C2 node."

Last year, Army Futures Command hosted the inaugural Project Convergence at Yuma Proving Ground in Arizona. A year later, the project has extended to other branches of the armed forces, with hopes that "lessons we learn will inform the Joint Warfighting Concept," he said.

"The United States Army exists for one reason -- to protect this great nation from all enemies, both foreign and domestic," he added. "We do this by remaining ready to fight and win the nation's wars as a member of the joint

During PC21, there will be seven scenarios known as “use cases,” he said. “As an example, one of those use cases is Joint Air and Missile Defense, something we’re very concerned about. If there’s an incoming missile attack, first we want our systems to be able to identify it.

“We are transforming to provide the joint force with speed, range and convergence of cutting-edge technologies to gain the decision dominance and overmatch we will need to win the next fight.”

Looking ahead at PC22, McConville said participants will expand even further to include allies and partners.

As more technology is being developed and fielded, McConville promised to keep people at the forefront of his priorities, a pledge he made during his first AUSA address as chief in 2019.

“People will always be the United States Army’s greatest strength and most important weapon system,” McConville said. “Our Soldiers in the active Army, Guard and Reserve, their families, our Army civilians and our Soldiers for Life, retirees and veterans.”

The Army plans to build cohesive teams that are “highly trained, disciplined, and fit and are ready to fight and win, where each person is treated with dignity and respect,” he said.

McConville noted that improving their quality of life along with their families is also important.

“Putting people first means aggressively getting after our quality of life priorities: housing, health care, child care, spouse employment, and permanent change of station moves,” he said.

Modernizing talent management was another example of how the Army is placing people first with initiatives such as a 21st century talent management system.

The Army is also expanding its assessment programs to sergeants major, acquisition leaders and chaplains after the success of command assessments for lieutenant colonels and colonels, he said.

A new human resources program, the Integrated Personnel Pay System-Army, is also set to be fully implemented this fiscal year, with all components integrated into a single personnel system, McConville said.

"I can envision a future where Soldiers will be able to serve across multiple components according to where they are in their careers and their lives," he added.

"People first, winning matters," McConville said, a term that has become synonymous with his tenure as the Army's 40th chief of staff.

McConville put his words into action during his speech at the Eisenhower presentation by performing an impromptu promotion ceremony for Spc. Justin Earnhart, the 2021 Soldier of the Year.

"How about a hand for the newest sergeant in the United States Army," McConville told the crowd, who applauded Earnhart during the unexpected event.

McConville also took the opportunity to highlight work done by Soldiers over the past year. Soldiers continued to respond whenever they were called, he said, from supporting COVID-19 missions to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

"People like our Soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, the 10th Mountain Division, the Red Bulls of the Minnesota National Guard, our special operations forces and the many other Soldiers who supported one of the largest evacuation efforts in our history," he said.

All told, Soldiers helped evacuate over 120,000 people from Kabul, Afghanistan.

Today, over 9,000 Soldiers are working as part of an interagency effort to help Afghan families transition to new lives, he said.

The general also took a moment to directly speak to all Soldiers and Soldiers for Life who served in Afghanistan over the past two decades. "What you did matters," he said. "What you did made a difference and nothing will ever change that.

"You can be proud of your service in combat, because I certainly am. I could not be more proud to serve with the greatest Soldiers in the world's greatest Army."