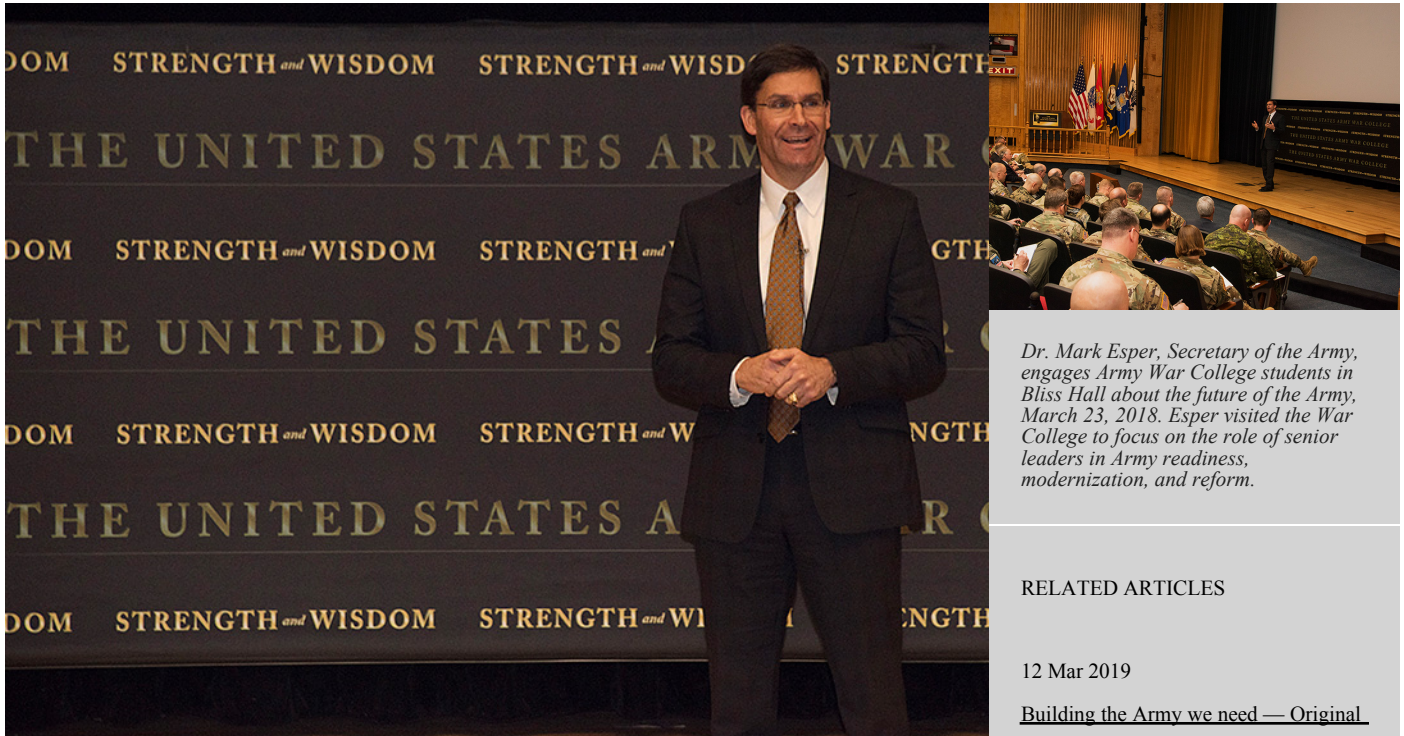


Building the Army we need

By Army Secretary Mark Esper 14 March 2019



Dr. Mark Esper, Secretary of the Army, engages Army War College students in Bliss Hall about the future of the Army, March 23, 2018. Esper visited the War College to focus on the role of senior leaders in Army readiness, modernization, and reform.

Dr. Mark Esper, Secretary of the Army, visited the War College to discuss the role of senior leaders in Army readiness, modernization, and reform, March 23, 2018. During his visit, he talked about the future of the Army with war college students.

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By Army Secretary Mark Esper, opinion contributor — (03/12/19 06:00 PM EDT) — Building the Army we need — <https://thehill.com/> — The views expressed by contributors are their own and not the view of The Hill

The United States Army is at a strategic inflection point. For the first time since the Cold War, the United States is in direct competition with near peer adversaries. Fortunately, Army readiness has been recovering from the years of budget uncertainty and increased operational commitments. With support from Congress, the Army has increased the number of ready brigade combat teams from 18 to 28 over the past two years. While I am confident that we would prevail against any foe today, our adversaries are working hard to contest the outcome of future conflicts. If our nation fails to modernize the Army now, we risk losing the first battles of the next war.

For the past 17 years, the Army has borne the brunt of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. For over a decade, we postponed modernization to procure equipment tailored to counterinsurgency operations. Our legacy combat systems, which were designed for high intensity conflict, entered service when I joined the Army in the early 1980s. While they dominated in past conflicts, incremental upgrades are no longer adequate for the demands of future battle as described in the national defense strategy. The United States must accelerate to the next generation of technology now, before Russia and China outpace us with their military modernization programs.

After invading Georgia in 2008, Russia had begun to aggressively upgrade its military. By 2014, Russia had developed its first prototype of the T14 Armata, a next generation tank equipped with advanced armor and a more powerful main gun than we possess. On top of field testing the T14 Armata this year, Russia is now experimenting with unmanned variants. Its artillery systems can outrange our systems, and when combined with drone reconnaissance and electronic warfare attacks, Russia has shown the ability to mass fire with devastating effectiveness.

In the long run, China presents an even greater threat. Modernization of its military has steadily advanced since the 1990s, aggressively investing in technologies such as artificial intelligence and directed energy to build a world class military. Further, the systematic theft of intellectual property allows Beijing to develop capabilities cheaper and faster than ever before. Under the current trajectory, Russia and China will soon employ advanced battlefield technologies that exceed some of our warfighting capabilities.

To prevent this, the Army developed six modernization priorities for our most urgent needs. These are long range precision fires, next generation combat vehicle, future vertical lift, air and missile defense, the network, and soldier lethality. We reengineered our entire modernization enterprise by establishing Army Futures Command to streamline the development of new weapons systems. As we reviewed our budget, we estimated that these programs would cost an additional \$4 billion to \$5 billion annually over the next several years. While we could have asked Congress for this money, we are well aware of the fiscal challenges our nation faces. So we instead decided to scour our budget to find those necessary resources.

To that end, Army leaders took an unprecedented initiative to extensively review each of our programs. Our goal was to find those programs that least contribute to Army lethality and reallocate those resources into higher priority activities. After months of painstaking deliberations, we eliminated, reduced, or delayed nearly 200 programs, freeing up over \$30 billion in the

next five years. We then reinvested this money into our top priorities, which are those systems we need to prevail in future wars.

This week, the Army released its part of the White House budget request to Congress. We know that to accomplish everything we have set out to do, from rebuild our warfighting readiness to modernizing the force and taking care of our soldiers, simply asking Congress for more money is not the answer. Instead, we are proposing bold changes within our budget that divest from the past in order to invest in the future. Congress urged the Army for years to reform, and we are doing just that with this plan.

Support for this budget is critical to build the Army that our nation needs. Those who are invested in legacy systems will fight to hold onto the past, arguing that jobs will be lost, our priorities are misguided, or that their programs are too small to make any difference in the budget. Many will take this shortsighted view, ignoring the billions of dollars in opportunity created by our investments in new technologies. While change will be difficult for some, we can no longer afford to delay Army modernization.

In this era of great power competition, we cannot risk falling behind. If left unchecked, Russia and China will only continue to erode the competitive advantage our military has held for decades. The Army has a clear vision and a sound strategy to maintain battlefield overmatch. We are making the tough choices. We need the support of Congress to modernize the force, and it starts with the fiscal 2020 budget. We owe it to our soldiers to provide them the weapons and equipment they need to win decisively in future battles. The American people should not accept anything less.

Mark Esper is the secretary of the United States Army.