

SecArmy discusses ‘extraordinary year’ for Army, future challenges

By Thomas Brading, Army News Service 12 October 2021



WASHINGTON — The Army secretary took the stage Monday morning to tout several wins by Soldiers this past year and promised to keep placing people first while addressing future challenges.

“Today’s Army must ask hard questions,” said Secretary of the Army Christine E. Wormuth during her first keynote address to kick off the Association of the U.S. Army Annual Meeting and Exposition. “I am not convinced we have fully thought our way through all of the challenges we face in the future.”

The Army secretary still expressed confidence that the force is capable of succeeding any mission if called upon. “We aren’t just any Army — we are America’s Army,” she said.

The Army had “an extraordinary year,” she said, despite challenges such as responding to natural disasters, the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. All of this while operating in

over 140 countries and maintaining global readiness amid the deadliest pandemic in American history.

“We have a lot to be proud of, but we also have a lot of work to do,” Wormuth said, adding that the Army has found itself at a strategic crossroads, with more changes to come.

“We still face an array of challenges [from] Russia, North Korea, Iran and terrorist groups like ISIS,” Wormuth said. “But one pacing challenge stands out above all — China — and we must transform to meet that challenge.”

To compete with near-peer competitors, leaders must adjust how they approach the fight and not take anything for granted in order to avoid attacks on the U.S. homeland, she said.

“If deterrence fails and either China or Russia makes the strategic mistake of threatening our vital interests with military aggression, we can no longer count on having months to project combat power overseas from an uncontested homeland, nor can we count on quickly establishing air superiority so that our forces can precisely strike targets with relative impunity,” she said.

In the face of growing concern, Wormuth believes the Army is “up to the challenge if we move decisively,” she said, because “the future is a lot closer than some of us think. Fortunately, the Army has not been standing still — far from it.”

For instance, the Army has been innovating, experimenting, and developing new weapons systems.

“This will lead to new formations as well,” she said, using the Army’s six security force assistance brigades as an example, which continue to deploy throughout the world.

Multi-domain task forces will also be strategically positioned to meet future challenges head on. “MDTFs give the Army the ability to deliver synchronized non-kinetic and kinetic effects over long ranges,” she said. “MDTFs operate across the spectrum from competition to conflict.”

The MDTF concept brings together cyber, space and information operations with long-range precision fire capabilities intended to disrupt and defeat adversary targets.

Elements of the 1st MDTF have already operated in the U.S. Indo-Pacific

Command, where they have taken part in training exercises such as Defender Pacific.

The unit is also slated to team up with Soldiers from 82nd Airborne Division this week during Project Convergence 2021, a series of joint warfighting exercises, she said. Dignity and respect

Dignity and respect

The success of the new formations and latest technologies will depend on Soldiers. To succeed, the Army must ensure all its Soldiers work in an environment free of sexual harassment and assault, she said.

“It’s not only a matter of principle, but also of national security,” she added.

The Army is launching a Fusion Directorate pilot program at six active-duty Army installations to ensure it is free from negative behavior, she said, as well as to make certain the response to sexual harassment/assault is victim-centered.

“The point isn’t just to respond better to episodes of sexual harassment and sexual assault; it is to stop them from happening in the first place,” she said. “That’s on all of us. Every leader has to ensure a command climate in which we take care of Soldiers as if they were members of our own family.”

To put words into action, the secretary recently transformed the Army Criminal Investigation Division by hiring a civilian director and committed to staffing the organization with roughly 60% civilian agents.

War for talent

Besides caring for people, the Army is also searching for talent to retain the best Soldiers. This drives the Army to recruit and keep “the very best,” she said, as well as provide excellent care to the outstanding individuals who wear the Army uniform.

Another example is how the Army selects many future leaders. Previously, leaders were selected by thumbing through personnel files. Now, to identify the best Soldiers for the right position regardless of race and gender, the Army is conducting blind interviews over several days.

This way of matching talent with jobs was initially successful for battalion and brigade commanders, so much that the Army expanded it to help select future sergeants major, she said.

"I'm very proud of what the Army has accomplished, but we have much more work ahead," Wormuth said.

In the coming year, the Army is on track to field multiple prototypes, including the Maneuver-Short Range Air Defense system, or M-SHORAD, the Lower Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor, commonly called the LTAMDS, and the robotic combat vehicle, she said.

In fiscal year 2022, the Army also plans to field its next-generation squad weapons, along with the new integrated air and missile defense platform and an integrated battle command system.

"Fiscal year 23 will be the year of long-range precision fires," Wormuth said. *"We'll see the first battery of the new long-range hypersonic weapon that we've developed with the Navy, as well as PrSM, our mid-range capability system, and the prototype of the extended-range cannon artillery."*

Even with all the upcoming capabilities, the Army needs to remain ready to deal with any challenges today, she said.

"This means thinking even harder about how to deter and to fight high-end adversaries," she said, adding that units will have to adapt existing capabilities in the short term until new operating concepts and capabilities become a reality.

"We're going to have to make hard decisions and follow through on them, but the Army has never shied away from a fight," she said. *"And I know we're not about to start now, so let's roll up our sleeves and get to work."*