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THE FUTURE COMBAT SYSTEM (FCS) program will enter a stringent design review in 2009 to make the congressionally mandated “go” or “no-go” decision on the future of this program. This discussion argues for continuing the FCS in 2009 and outlines necessary actions the Army must do to secure the future of the program. FCS provides the Army with increased relevancy and integration that allows America’s war machine to face the challenges of an adaptive enemy and succeed in future operations. The Army must communicate the level of relevancy FCS brings to the future force and the need to integrate the systems and technologies once and for all as the justification to gain buy-in, thus securing the future of the FCS program.

The relevancy of the FCS program is critical for the Army’s ability to counter emerging threats and to continue to be successful in the long-term. FCS “is the Army’s first full-spectrum modernization in nearly 40 years.”¹ In the midst of a new National Security Strategy and the Quarterly Defense Review, the Army must remain relevant and ready to face an adaptive enemy while maintaining its conventional capabilities. Representative Jim Saxton from New Jersey visited troops in Iraq and highlights that “battles are won and lost down in the mud, by warriors who are armed with the right equipment and are well-trained . . . this is the core of America’s military success story” (April 2008, page one). The FCS investment is necessary for the Army to transition from the digitalization age of the 1990s to a new era where initial equipment design activities accounts for interoperability in the early stages of the development cycle.

Another point of view argues that the FCS program entered the development phase with immature technologies and undefined requirements, thus contributing to the increase of a \$90 billion effort to one of over \$230

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PHOTO: Soldiers demonstrate an assault and breach maneuver at the future combat system facility at Fort Bliss, Texas, 1 May 2008. (DOD, Cherie Cullen)

billion.² This past June, the Army announced that it will accelerate the use of specific FCS equipment by 2011 in an effort to help deployed infantry units in Iraq and Afghanistan. This new strategy will allow FCS equipment testing to leverage the real conditions of the battlefield and provide a realistic quality control opportunity to assess how well the equipment satisfies the requirements. FCS equipment developed, tested, and certified under real conditions will achieve a higher degree of relevancy for the future Army structure. The equipment will also require integration with current and future systems.

The need for an overarching technological solution that allows for full integration of the Army's disparate technologies is more critical now than ever. The FCS program will also network existing systems with new systems in on-going development and with future systems.³ The tragic events from 9/11 proved that government and civilian agencies are unable to communicate and reminded us of the importance of integrating the distinct radio systems and networks each agency operates. Another technological challenge that directly affects operations is the effective integration of the information system applications developed for specific functional branches such as Military Intelligence, Signal, and Air Defense. These systems require ad-hoc solutions on the fly to achieve a relative level of interoperability and to provide the information commanders need in support of battlefield operations.

The newly published Field Manual 3-07, *Stability Operations*, directs more integration with interagency and nongovernmental organizations as military forces transition from major combat to

reconstruction and nation-building operations. The Army not only has to reach out to other services in the Department of Defense, but also must now consider interoperability with other key players such as the State Department and USAID (interagency). The new specified tasks in the field manual require the military to change its acquisition strategy from one that allows services to procure service-unique equipment to one that allows equipment adaptability to myriad operations from traditional to irregular warfare and even civil support operations. The systems-of-systems approach in the FCS program will enable the military to close this critical gap and increase the value of future operations.

The Army future force must remain relevant in weapons systems and technology to face the future challenges of both regular and irregular warfare. The FCS program prevents the Army from investing resources in digitizing old equipment to keep it relevant. The program also enables a cohesive environment where interoperability is paramount without compromising lethality. As such, the Army should continue to justify the FCS program in terms of capabilities, meet the milestones in the design phase, and set the conditions to conduct a successful design review in 2009 that would allow for funding stability and confidence building. Army leadership must prevent the decrease in FCS capabilities to remain within budget limits to realize the full potential of this critical program. **MR**

NOTES

1. Future Combat Systems, Brigade Combat Team (FCS (BCT)), *White Paper*, 14 March 2007, 1.
2. Noah Shachtman, *Congress Pulls Plug on Shady Defense Deals*, 14 December 2007 <<http://blog.wired.com/defense/2007/12/the-armys-shady.html>>.
3. Future Combat Systems, Brigade Combat Team, 1.