



Force Changes Bring Opportunities, Hagel Tells Troops

By Karen Parish

American Forces Press Service

Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told soldiers of the nation's reorganizing Army today that now is the time for creative adaptation.

Hagel spoke to an audience of soldiers and civilian employees at Fort Carson, Colo., home of the Army's 4th Infantry Division. The secretary has visited several military installations in the state over the past two days.

Hagel noted that one of the Army brigade combat teams to be eliminated is based at Fort Carson, and added that after the Army finishes reorganizing, the post will see a force increase.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. Ray Odierno announced this week the Army will cut its brigade combat teams from 45 to 33, and shrink its active-duty end strength

from a wartime high of 570,000 to 490,000 soldiers. The general told reporters June 25 that the Army will add a maneuver battalion and fires and engineer capabilities to each of its remaining armor and infantry brigade combat teams, "to make them more lethal, more flexible and more agile."

Hagel told Fort Carson troops the new Army structure is an example of gain through strain.

"I think Army leadership is right on this," he said. "And it isn't just a matter of being forced by constraints, law, budgets, but it's the smart thing to do."

The nation's military needs to adjust and change after two long wars and in the face of new threats, he said.

"This is the time to be creative. This is the time to use

this opportunity to make those choices,” Hagel added.

“And we have to prepare the institution,” the secretary said. “The next set of [privates first class] behind you, you need to help prepare them so they inherit a structure, a system that is going to give them the ability to deal with those new threats that none of us can figure out today.”

Later, in response to a soldier’s question about options for voluntary separation, Hagel said such approaches will be considered as force structure changes advance.

Bringing creative ideas forward during change, he added, “is part of the unwinding and the unfolding of bringing that force structure down. Do it smartly. Do it wisely. Do it in ways that make sense.”

The secretary also thanked Fort Carson troops who have worked to fight fires that have blackened more than 75,000 acres in southwest Colorado since June 11.

“Your work has been spectacular, and it has gained recognition and thanks from every corner,” Hagel said. “And I know the people of Colorado are grateful, the people of our country are grateful, and we’re very proud in the Department of Defense for what you’ve done, what

you continue to do.”

He said while firefighting and disaster relief aren’t in a soldier’s job description, “it is really who you are and who we are as Americans, and I think who we are as part of the security team that defends this country in every way.”

Hagel also discussed the upcoming civilian employee furloughs, under which civilian defense workers are braced for up to 11 days of unpaid leave from July through September.

The secretary said while defense leaders made every effort to reduce or eliminate furloughs, “in the end, ... I could not cut any more into readiness. And we’ve already cut into readiness. You know that we are standing down 16 Air Force squadrons. We’re not sailing a lot of ships. No new training in the Army, and there are other consequences.”

Hagel pledged to reduce the effects on the workforce as much as possible, and said he has no higher priority as secretary than maintaining programs that support troops and families.



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