

Soldiers May Be Taking Over Jobs Currently Performed by Contractors

By Eric Beidel

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FORT LAUDERDALE - The Army is considering taking over much of the grunt work that in recent years has been performed by contractors, such as maintaining helicopters and fixing trucks.

"Part of this is getting back in the balance of what skill sets we're going to get our great contractors to continue to do for us and what kind of skill sets are soldiers going to do," Maj. Gen. Raymond Mason, deputy chief of staff for Army Forces Command, said Feb. 24 at the Association of the U.S. Army's annual winter symposium.

Soldiers have become accustomed to using equipment and dropping it off for others to repair or maintain, Mason said. "We truly have run a rental car company for the last five or six years."

That may change as the pace of combat deployments slows down and contract spending tightens up. The goal is to have soldiers eventually prep their own ground vehicles and aircraft. By 2020, a unit may be completely responsible for its own "60-day reset process," said Lt. Gen. James Pillsbury, deputy commanding general of the Army Materiel Command.

To ease the burden, the Army will be investing in technologies such as condition-based maintenance systems, that help predict failures in equipment. One staff sergeant mechanic put it simply: "It saves me a lot of time."

Last year, the Army saved \$210 million in aviation repairs thanks to condition-based maintenance, Pillsbury said. The Army checks out its Black Hawk helicopters every 720 hours of flight. Inspectors tear them apart and more often than not, will record that everything is working OK. Then, they put the aircraft back together.

"We don't need to do that anymore," Pillsbury said. "We have to move our maintenance mindset from the industrial age into the information age."

The service also is seeking to save money by consolidating maintenance and depot work contracts. AMC is assuming oversight of this effort as the Army prepares to deal with a huge backlog of repair work. In Iraq, there are about 4,000 Humvees that will need to come back through the Army's depots for extensive fixes.

With the new approach, "when a truck comes out of Iraq or Afghanistan, we now know which unit is going to get it when it comes off the assembly line," said James Dwyer, deputy chief of staff for logistics at the AMC.