



General George W. Casey, Jr., is Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army.

## An Interview with George W. Casey, Jr.

**JFQ:** *The Army traditionally recruits recent high school graduates. Today, however, fewer younger people meet minimum standards for service, and more are going on to higher education. There is a declining pool of candidates, and, frankly, the possibility of military service does not even enter the minds of many. What initiatives are under way to deal with this?*

**General Casey:** This gets right to the heart of the issue about how we recruit and sustain an all-volunteer force at war, and it's something that we're breaking new ground on every day. The last time we did it was

the American Revolution. That said, all the things you stated in the question are true: the number of high school graduates is down, the number with the propensity to serve is down. But last year, fiscal year 2008, almost 290,000 men and women enlisted or reenlisted in the Army, Guard, and Reserve. When they signed up, they all knew that they were going to war. That speaks highly of the men and women of the United States of America. Now, as you can imagine, we are looking at that and saying, "Are the recruiting procedures and skills that we've used since the early 1980s still sufficient to serve us in this current environment?" And intuitively, we say, "Probably

not; there's got to be something different that we can do." We're trying a range of things—one of them is the Army Experience Center in Philadelphia—to bring technology to bear in a way that relates more to the folks that we're trying to attract. And I've made a note to myself to swing by and see it myself. I've only heard about it, but it's probably a little too early to tell how it's going to work out.

One of the other things we're doing is a forum we're participating in called Investment in America. It's a group of business, not-for-profit, and Army leaders, and we meet every year and talk about ways that we can work together to do things that will help the country. Last summer, for example, the discussion turned to how we build an educated population for both the business community and the military. The business community faces the exact same challenges

Colonel David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.), and Dr. Jeffrey D. Smotherman of *Joint Force Quarterly* interviewed General Casey at his Pentagon office.

that we do. The folks that they're getting out of the high schools don't have the intellectual skills, the writing skills, the communication skills, and frankly, they don't have the ethical and moral skills that business leaders are looking for. And so we've had several sessions since then, and we're working to put together a group where we can go into a city and say, "Here's a group of business, not-for-profit, and military folks who want to work with you to improve secondary education in your city." Obviously, business brings money and the promise of jobs; we bring Junior ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] and other things. And I expect to have a plan that we might offer a couple of target cities. Mayor [Richard] Daley in Chicago has already done some amazing things with Junior ROTC, and when I was there for the Memorial Day parade, he invited me to be the grand marshal. The mayor had these marching units of Junior ROTC cadets representing the high schools, and he knew about every one of the schools. When you look at these formations walking down the street, almost all in step, you could see the power that Junior ROTC brings and the discipline that allows them to finish school, to get more out of the school that they're in, and achieve better test scores and better completion rates.

So this is a long way of saying we need to focus not only on changing how we recruit but also how we think we could work with folks on improving the level of secondary education in the country. We think it's something that we could do to help the country and also help us on the side.

**JFQ:** *The Army Force Generation model was created to optimize your personnel/training/equipment investments. Do you have any concerns that the Force Generation model short-changes the broader national security needs of the country, particularly those of the Governors and homeland defense needs?*

**General Casey:** Short answer: *no*. But in fact, I think it's even more important for us to put ourselves on a cyclical readiness model where we can both generate forces to sustain long-term commitments and have forces ready to do other things. Before September 11, 2001, we were basically a garrison-based Army that lived to train, and we were very good at it. The rotations into the Balkans were the closest we had to the situation we

find ourselves in now, and that certainly didn't impact anywhere near the percentage of the Army that these current deployments have. So we say that we need to be expeditionary, which is one of the key characteristics of the Army in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To do that, we have to put ourselves on a rotational model. ARFORGEN [Army Force Generation] is that rotational model. It allows us, one, to give predictability to the Soldiers and their families because they know where they are in the cycle; two, to continually generate forces to sustain the long-term commitments; and three, to have forces in readiness that are trained, equipped, manned, that can go anywhere on short notice. If you look at the different phases of the cycle, I think it's exactly the model that we need for an era of persistent conflict. I believe that's where we are. We're at war, we've been at war for 7 years, and all the emerging global trends will probably exacerbate rather than ameliorate those conditions. And so I believe we, the ground forces, and the air and naval forces to a lesser extent, are going to be committed either in engagements or other activities for the foreseeable future, and we need to have a force generation model that allows us to continually prepare our forces for that.

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I mentioned that before September 11, we were a garrison-based Army that lived to train. As a result, all our systems of personnel, education, family support, training—they're all designed to support a pre-September 11 Army. But on a force generation model, you have different requirements. For example, we are trying to move this model so that when a unit is in the deployment window, it can deploy without stop-loss. Our personnel systems aren't designed to do that now, and you can imagine what it takes to get everybody in a unit lined up so they don't have a DEROS [date eligible to return from overseas] date in the middle of the deployment. So that's where we have to get to. And if you think about training, everything else has an aspect like that.

So I think the force generation model is exactly where we need to be. Frankly, we're the last Service to come on to this. The Marines and Navy have been doing it for years; the Air Force had their expeditionary rotational forces, and this is something that I think we need to do, and we're doing it now.

The Governors and homeland defense—I think this model actually *helps* the Governors because it gives them visibility of when their forces will be deployed, and it allows them to work the interstate compacts to hedge against problems that may arise when the forces are gone. Steve Blum [Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, Chief, National Guard Bureau] promised the Governors several years ago that he'd ensure they'd always have 50 percent of their capabilities, and he's been able to do that. So actually, I think the ARFORGEN helps the Governors and the homeland security needs.

**JFQ:** *The National Guard has an informal social compact with the U.S. population regarding the use of the Reserve Component. The National Guard must have forces ready and available for domestic disasters and threats, while at the same time they are heavily engaged overseas. What steps have you taken to ensure that there is no negative impact on our strategic reserve?*

**General Casey:** That's a great question, and it's one that we're going to have to continue to wrestle with in the coming years. We say that we need to adapt our Guard and Reserve forces from their role as strictly a strategic reserve to an operational force that can augment the Active forces in sustaining commitments abroad. That's caused major change in how we deal with the Guard and Reserve because all of the policies, procedures, and laws governing the Guard and Reserve were developed after the Korean War. As with anything else in Washington that's 60 years old, there are deep roots. And the policies aren't necessarily designed to support the way we use the Guard and Reserve right now. We have told the Guard and Reserve that we want to work toward a rotational scheme where they deploy for a year and are home for 4 or 5 years. They tell us that's sustainable. I believe it is sustainable, but we're not there yet. Right now the Guard and Reserve are deploying about once every 3½ years, but their recruiting and their retention are still good. So we're wrestling with finding

the right role for the Guard and Reserve, and I think that a new administration is probably going to want to look at whether we are prepared to sustain a commitment of 60,000 to 70,000 mobilized Reserve Soldiers and Guardsmen for the indefinite future. It's a question that we've discussed, and the Guard and Reserves say it's sustainable, but it's not necessarily our call. Right now, we have about 68,000 mobilized Guardsmen and Reserve Soldiers on Active duty, and obviously if we don't have access to them, then that speaks to what we need to do with the size of the Active force. So that's an important consideration as we go forward.

With respect to the strategic reserve part of this, the Guard and Reserve are about half our force. We're much more reliant on the Guard and Reserve than are the other Services. And so we always have some portion of them not committed. There are about half a million Guardsmen and Reservists, and we've had about 60,000 or 70,000 deployed on a given day, so we still have a strategic reserve, even though we are deploying the bulk of them as an operational force.

**JFQ:** *A number of academics assert that the time-honored code of loyal opposition behind closed doors is in decline and that private dissent is neither encouraged nor well tolerated within the Army. What is your view of this charge?*

**General Casey:** I think it's outdated. When you have an organization this size, about a million people, I'm sure there are some people who feel like dissent isn't tolerated. But by and large, this is a combat-seasoned force. The leaders have all known combat, and in combat, things don't always go exactly how you planned. What you want is people asking hard questions before an operation. I can remember as a captain getting the operations order brief from the battalion S3 [commander's principal staff officer for matters concerning operations, plans, organization, and training], and at the end of every brief, he said, "Are there any questions?" And you'd be sitting there thinking, "This is the dumbest thing I ever heard," but everybody said, "No," and you all charged out the door. Well, that doesn't happen any more today, because people's lives are at stake. You'd say, "Wait a minute, colonel, time out! I don't get it." So I don't entirely dispute the conventional wisdom. In fact, when I hear,

"Good news, general, we have a course of action we all agree on," I sometimes think, "Uh-oh, this might be a half-baked course of action because it's all about compromise."

**JFQ:** *On September 30, 2008, Secretary of Defense Gates said, "One of the enduring issues our military struggles with is whether personnel and promotions systems designed to reward command of American troops will be able to reflect the importance of advising, training, and equipping foreign troops—which is still not considered a career-enhancing path for our best and brightest officers." The Army is investing in the development and training of large numbers of advisors to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. Will the Army continue and expand this program? If so, will it become a career track?*

**General Casey:** I don't think it will become a career track, but let me give you some background. We started the transition team program when I was in Iraq, and I talked to every group that came in and told them that the success of the mission in Iraq, and also in Afghanistan, was dependent on the security forces of the other countries being able to provide domestic order and deny their countries as a safe haven for terror. So we weren't going to succeed in either Iraq or Afghanistan until the local security forces succeeded, and so they were a critical enabler to the overall success of the mission.

It's always hard to change the culture. And frankly, it took almost a year for my own personnel guys to change the policy to make transition team leaders a command select position for the brigade and battalion transition team leaders. But we're doing that. A board met this past fall that actually picked folks off the central selection list to lead these efforts. It is that important.

Now, there are some folks who say we need an advisor corps. I'd say we have an advisor corps; it's called Special Forces. The question is how large of an effort do we need for training foreign armies. I got together with Jim Mattis [General James N. Mattis, USMC, commander, U.S. Joint Forces Command], Jim Conway [General James T. Conway, commandant, U.S. Marine Corps], and Eric Olson [Admiral Eric T. Olson, USN, commander, U.S. Special Operations Command]. We all sat down and said, "Okay, what do we really need here?" First, we all thought we needed to set ourselves up in Iraq and Afghanistan for the long haul because we're going to be training the militaries and the police forces in Iraq and Afghanistan for a while. Then we thought that we could probably do the rest of the engagement with other militaries with Special Forces, and we're growing a battalion each year over the next 5 years. There may be times when we need to have Special Forces teams augmented with conventional forces. For example, we can send a 10-man team out of a brigade

U.S. Army (Courtesy Wittmann)



**GEN Casey and Chicago Mayor Richard Daley participate in Memorial Day celebration**

headquarters, lash them up with an A-team, and they can assist in training with foreign brigades. But more and more, the people who need our help are not going to be in a position where they can be openly seen with American Soldiers running around the country. So we're looking more toward the majority of this work being done by Special Forces, augmented, when they need to be, by regionally oriented conventional forces, which is something else the ARFORGEN model allows us to do.

We also asked ourselves if we really think we're going to build another country's army and police forces and ministries from the ground up any time soon. And the answer was, probably not. We've got several challenges: we've got to set ourselves up to do Iraq and Afghanistan for the long haul, and then figure out how we augment Special Forces to do the other engagement that we need. That's kind of the direction we're going. In the interim, we have a training center for transition teams that we're going to continue to run, it's going to move down to Fort Polk, out of Fort Riley, and we're going to have a brigade dedicated to doing nothing but training transition teams. So we'll continue to do that for a while.

I just came back from Afghanistan, and more and more I'm hearing Soldiers on the ground say that the partnerships—matching an Afghan battalion up with a coalition battalion or a coalition company—is having a greater impact on the indigenous forces than the transition teams. We may not need as many transition teams; just aligning them with the coalition forces may be a better way to go. In Iraq we had both; we had transition teams and partnership, and that seemed to work. So I think you may see how transition teams are evolving a little bit in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we're working with the theater to see what the best way to go is. But at least in Iraq, and to some extent in Afghanistan, the proficiency of indigenous forces is getting to where they don't need to have somebody with them every day; they can operate side by side. So I think it's going to evolve a little bit, but I'm not exactly sure how it's going to go.

If you think about what land power is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, you realize it's the ability to generate decisive results on land. And who does that? It's not just the Army, it's the Marine Corps, it's Special Forces, it's our allied forces, it's indigenous forces, and also,

it's all the interagency forces. And all those elements have to come together to generate the decisive results we are seeking. Indigenous forces are a huge part of that, and our guys are recognizing that more and more. When I started in Iraq, it was our nature to say, "Let me do it." And I did this myself in Bosnia. And over time, we've come to realize that the key to long-term success is indigenous forces. It's artful; it takes more art to train somebody else to do missions than to do them yourself, but I think we're getting more and more sophisticated in our abilities.

**JFQ:** *How might the need to address hybrid threats impact the Future Combat Systems [FCS] program, which is founded on a more conventionally oriented type of threat? Is the FCS program well balanced in the overall conflict spectrum?*

**General Casey:** To be fair, when we started down the FCS road in the late 1990s, it was designed to fight conventional war as we thought it would be in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that's where we started. Over time, our understanding of irregular warfare has matured and evolved, and frankly I came back from Iraq and I took one look at the FCS capabilities we had and said, "This is the stuff we need in Iraq and Afghanistan today." We went through a big review of the program and announced in May that we have these five capabilities that were developed for the FCS program that are out now in the hands of Soldiers who are testing them: the unmanned aerial vehicle, the robot, the unattended ground sensors, the non-line-of-sight cannon, which is basically a 40-kilometer cruise missile that will fly in the window of a house, and the land warrior system that we cancelled, but someone was smart enough to keep one battalion's worth of it, and we put it on a battalion that went to Iraq. I visited them there, and they said that they would rather leave the compound without their weapons than without their land warrior system. It basically gives them an eyepiece where they can view a computer screen, and they have a military BlackBerry, so they can stay connected when they're out there. They know where everybody in their squad is—they know where everybody is, so their situational awareness is huge. So you put all that together, and we put it in the hands of Soldiers out at Fort Bliss who had just come back from Iraq, and they all said the same

thing I did, that *these are the capabilities we have to have right now.*

We were originally going to put all that in the heavy force, which is already the best heavy force in the world. And so we said, why don't we take these capabilities and put them in the light forces, who need them right now. So we're doing that, and we'll have it in the hands of the light Soldiers in 2011. The first brigade, which means probably the last of the "Grow the Army" brigades that we build, will be outfitted with the FCS systems and the first increment of the network, and we'll continue to build the rest of the systems over time.

So we have to build the Future Combat System as a full-spectrum combat system. I think we're moving in the right direction, and what we're going to see now is not just 15 FCS brigades that come out of this, but we're going to have an FCS-enabled Army, and it will start with the infantry guys, and that will be a fundamentally different Army. What you're going to see also is the FCS capabilities overlaid on modular organizations, and that's what the Army of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will ultimately look like. We're still refining that, but simplistically said, that's what's going to happen. It will be a full-spectrum Army.

**JFQ:** *The United States persistently fails to learn from past mistakes by taking "peace dividends" and downsizing or neglecting the Armed Forces in the aftermath of significant conflict. In the face of adverse economic conditions, how concerned are you about the possibility of yet another shortsighted readiness calamity?*

**General Casey:** Any reader of our history has to be concerned. After every war, we have been drawn down drastically. When I had a transition team help me prepare to come into this job, I had one group focus on the future and one group focus on the present. The future group was looking at about 2020 to determine the kind of Army we're going to need then, and the current group was looking at the current force, but I also said, "You guys, go back 13 years in the other direction, go back to 1993 and tell us what we were doing back then." Think about it. We were basking in the glow of *Desert Shield/Desert Storm*, we were patting ourselves on the back for winning the Cold War, we were spending the peace dividend as fast as we could write the checks, and we were drawing the Army down by 300,000—from

780,000 to 480,000. We were cutting the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], we were cutting USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development]. I tell folks, “Now we’re at war, we’re facing a future of persistent conflict, you ought not to be thinking about taking the peace dividend right now.” All that said, I don’t think anybody knows the impact of the financial crisis, but none of us think it’s going to be positive, so I think there’s going to be real tension on this. We just have to be careful, we have to keep reminding ourselves that we’re at war, we’ve got over 150,000 Soldiers deployed in combat, we’ve got to be really careful with that; they need to be sustained. And I think they will.

**JFQ:** *General James Conway says that it is vital to extract the Marine Corps from land fighting and return it to its expeditionary, maritime-based roots because the world 20 years from now will be drastically different. How will the Army recalibrate for the challenges anticipated two decades from now?*

**General Casey:** [General Conway] talks about this all the time, and he’s right. We have done an awful lot of thinking about what the future looks like. Pete Schoomaker [General Peter Schoomaker, 35<sup>th</sup> Chief of Staff of the Army] had us on a great track with the conversion to these modular organizations—we’re 80-plus percent done—and rebalancing skills to ones that are more relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We’re transforming. And our knowledge is increasingly enhanced by what we’re learning daily in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we’ve been looking hard at what we think the strategic environment is going to look like. I believe the future will be one of persistent conflict where we’re dealing with state and nonstate actors who are increasingly willing to use violence to accomplish their objectives. That doesn’t mean we’re going to be engaged at the same level as Iraq and Afghanistan, but we have to prepare ourselves to deal with that eventuality. The future is not going to be peaceful.

The second part is that we’ve asked ourselves, how has the character of conflict changed? The nature of war doesn’t change, but the character of conflict can change, and as I look back at the character of the wars that I’ve prepared to fight in my career, it’s fundamentally different now for young folks. They’re dealing with nonstate actors. I look at the Lebanon conflict in December 2006. Here

you have a nonstate actor, Hizballah, operating inside a state, Lebanon, fighting another state, Israel, [and] supported by yet another state, Iran. And Hizballah starts the war with 13,000 rockets: The tools of power are no longer exclusively in the hands of states, and nonstate actors are a bit harder to deter than state actors. So we looked at that—we looked at the need to operate with indigenous forces, the need to operate with other agencies of the government, the need to sustain ourselves in austere environments over the long haul.

And we believe that land forces for the future need to have six characteristics. First of all, they need to be versatile. I gave you my thoughts about the future knowing full well that the best we’re going to do is get it about right. And so we have to design and equip forces with a doctrine that allows them to be rapidly tailored to the future as it presents itself. The modular organizations that we’ve gone forward with here are a good example of that.

Second, they’ve got to be expeditionary. With the exception of domestic support to civil authorities, we’re going to be doing things abroad, and we have to be able to get there quickly, we have to sustain the fight, and we have to build leaders with an

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expeditionary mindset that are uncowed by going into a strange environment. I just saw that up in New York. I went up to visit the 3/10 Mountain [3<sup>d</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division], whose mission was just changed from Iraq to Afghanistan. And what you’ve got there is not a bunch of guys thinking they’re going to go out there and do something new, but seasoned veterans who understood the challenges they were getting into and weren’t cowed by it. They were confident. They had that expeditionary mindset.

Third, they need to be agile. Leaders, units, and institutions need to be agile. Our institutions aren’t very agile right now because we haven’t had to be agile in the past. Secretary Gates asks why the heck it takes so long to get an MRAP [Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle] and additional ISR [intelligence,

surveillance, and reconnaissance] over to Iraq or Afghanistan. We need to be better, and we need to have institutions that, when we get put in a new situation, can rapidly evaluate it and give the Soldiers the tools and the equipment needed to get the job done.

Fourth, they have to be lethal. That is our core competency, and we can’t forget that. We can’t get diverted by all these other things that we have to do. Lethality is our core competency, and it’s got to be precision lethality. That goes with the kind of systems we’re developing.

Fifth, they have to be sustainable, and not just sustainable in austere environments. We’ve got to have a reduced logistical footprint because the more equipment you expose on the roads, the greater your challenges are going to be. The other piece of sustainability is having this force generation model that allows you to sustain missions over the long duration.

Lastly, we have to be interoperable. Interoperability goes well beyond joint and combined forces. We have to be able to bring in all the effects that the interagency and the local governments bring to bear. I have come to think that the planning and organizational skills of our land forces are a national asset and ought to be treated as a national asset. We understand how to plan, organize, and integrate. I watched it in Iraq. We’re doing it in Iraq, and we’re doing it in Afghanistan. We understand how to bring different elements of power together to generate that decisive result. We don’t have to be in charge; other elements of the government ought to leverage that potential and that capability. So interoperability goes well beyond the same size ammunition and the same radio frequency. We’re at a whole new level now, and we have to be able to bring all those elements of power together. So those are the six characteristics that we’re designing our forces around.

We have come a long way with jointness. I’ve watched us get better and better. We have a growing generation of officers at the company and battalion level who understand jointness. We’ve had infantry platoons with Marine battalions calling in naval air in Fal-lujah, so these guys understand how to apply joint power in combat. And we have to figure out how to continue to build on that and then to bring in the interagency and really expand the notion of jointness to work in interoperability with all the other elements of government. I think that’s something that all the Services can work on in the years ahead. **JFQ**