Partnership with Industry Key to Technology Leaps

A reinvigorated partnership with industry is key to achieving the technology hurdles facing the U.S. Special Operations Command, according to retired U.S. Marine Corps Gen. Richard Hearney.

Hearney, who as a member of the National Defense Panel co-authored "Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century," was a featured speaker at the ninth annual Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict Symposium and Exhibition in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 18. The symposium is sponsored by the National Defense Industrial Association.

A former assistant commandant of Headquarters Marine Corps, Hearney is now vice president of domestic Business Development for the McDonnell Aircraft and Missile Systems business unit of The Boeing Company.

"I firmly believe the next phase of Special Operations Force's evolution and maturation will require not only improved technology, but in a greater sense breakthrough technology," he told those in attendance, citing the key areas of mobility, sensing and identification, miniaturization, secure communications, advanced munitions, stealth, human enhancements and robotics.

"That's why a new, reinvigorated partnership between Special Operations Forces and industry is so important," he said. "I encourage Special Operations to involve its industry partners as early as possible in the process to define and develop requirements. If industry participates early in the requirements definition process, you can then leverage the industrial internal research and development investment accounts just as you have successfully done with the services and laboratories.

"Second, to fund technology breakthroughs, let industry do its part to squeeze the costs out of your operations. Allowing contractors to apply commercial processes to support Special Operations Forces systems will free up resources that can be earmarked for solving future technology needs."

To achieve those technology breakthroughs, Hearney said this new partnership between Special Operations Forces and industry will require new ways of working, from both the customer and contractor perspectives.

"Contractor logistics support may be the best answer for Special Operations Forces," Hearney said. "It has been proven to be tailor-made to support a number of the highly specialized systems that Special Operations Forces operate. Extending this concept will almost certainly achieve critical cost savings. I urge U.S. Special Operations Command to re-examine its current support posture in partnership with industry, and not be bound by traditional ways of doing business. Industry can provide the weapons to fight the war against the 'cost of ownership.'"

Hearney said industry also has a responsibility in this partnership. "We in industry must do our part to help take the costs out of our products. By developing and building systems with increased mean time between failures, less man-in-the-loop support, among other methods, we can help turn some operation dollars into technology development dollars."

According to Hearney, that type of industry involvement is essential in the operational environment U.S. Special Operations Command is facing. "Your operational tempo is increasing daily, and your sustainment bills are increasing hourly," he said. "And these bills are all being paid out of your investment accounts. Simply put, your today is consuming your tomorrow.

"I'm confident, however, that as a truly joint team -- Special Operations Forces and industry -- we can develop, build and support a new realm of technology that will achieve your Vision 2020."

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