

Force Cuts May Mean New Job For Some Soldiers

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WASHINGTON - With the Army leaving Iraq by the end of the month and large drawdowns coming in Afghanistan, officials said the service may shrink by 50,000 over the next few years.

Cutting that many Soldiers from the Army may mean some will be asked to leave before they planned. And others may need to transfer to a new military occupational specialty, said Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III.

"Right now we are at a crossroads in our Army," Chandler said at a blogger's roundtable Wednesday. "We have continuing responsibilities overseas with our war in Iraq and Afghanistan and other places around the globe, and at the same time we are wrestling with reduced budgets and what that impact will be on our Army; and the drawdown in the force, and how we are going to manage that transition over the next several years."

Chandler said the Army will use four tools to cut the force by 50,000. First, the Army will bring in fewer Soldiers from the civilian world. At the height of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army brought as many as 80,000 Soldiers a year into service. This

is about 58,000, Chandler said.

Second, Chandler said, the Army will retain fewer Soldiers. That means it may be tougher for some Soldiers to re-enlist, and for those that want to re-enlist, they may have to do something different.

"The retention piece is the one that is going to affect a lot of folks in our Army," Chandler said. "Everybody will be touched in some capacity. But for our Soldiers that are eligible to re-enlist, the standard is going to be excellence. We are looking for the best and the brightest in our Army, (to) offer the privilege of service. And it is really a two-part decision."

The first part of that decision to retain a Soldier will include the Soldier's own commitment to serve. The second part of that decision will include putting Soldiers where the Army needs them.

"You have to be committed to serve the Army in the capacity that we need you," Chandler said. "There are going to be some Soldiers that are going to be afforded the privilege to stay in service, but they may have to choose a different MOS (military occupational specialty). And for some folks that may not be palatable."

best folks" to stay in the Army will include some of the same tools used to decide promotion: military education, civilian education, duty performance, and a Soldier's own "desire to seek greater responsibility and other skills."

"[It's] all going to be part of that equation that commanders will make to decide whether or not somebody will be able to stay," Chandler said.

A third tool to cut the force will be adjustment of retention control points for sergeants and staff sergeants. The RCP is a cap on the number of years a Soldier may be in service without attaining the next higher rank.

With planned changes to the Army's RCPs, Chandler said, "probably anywhere from 1,500 to 1,800 sergeants and staff sergeants will end up leaving the Army earlier than they may have anticipated."

He said the change is not because of the drawdown, but rather because of adjustments made in leader development strategies about when people would get promoted.

"We had to make some adjustments, and some folks, unfortunately, will have to leave," Chandler said.

Also a tool to reduce the



Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler recognizes Soldiers of the 170th Infantry Brigade Combat Team in Afghanistan earlier this year. With drawdowns coming in theater, he said retention standards will tighten and some Soldiers may need to change occupational specialties.

ly retirements, "probably starting next fiscal year," Chandler said. The Army will conduct selective early retirement boards for sergeants first class, master sergeants, and sergeants major.

"We will look at whether or not Soldiers in that rank have any future potential and whether or not their MOS or career management field may be over strength and we'll tell them that it is time to retire now instead of waiting until their mandatory retirement date," he said.

Chandler said he has spent nine months travel-

ing around the Army talking to Soldiers and families and talking with them about their concerns.

"I see myself as a scout, where I go out and find our Soldiers and hear what their concerns are and bring that information back to General Odierno, and share what they have to say," Chandler said.

One of the primary concerns Soldiers have involves how the budget may affect their retirement. The sergeant major said he and other leaders are committed to preserving for Soldiers what they were promised.

"The bottom line is this, the president, through the secretary of Defense, and the secretary of the Army and the chief and myself are committed to maintaining the current system of retirement for those that currently serve," Chandler said. "I meet with members of Congress. I have yet to find a member of Congress who said that we are willing to cut retirement for those currently in uniform, because they all understand the commitment and the sacrifice that very small population of folks have paid to our nation."